

創価大学
国際仏教学高等研究所
年報

平成 11 年度
(第 3 号)

Annual Report
of
The International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology
at Soka University
for the Academic Year 1999

創価大学・国際仏教学高等研究所
東京・2000・八王子

The International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology
Soka University
Tokyo · 2000

A PRELIMINARY STUDY ON MEDITATION AND THE BEGINNINGS OF MAHĀYĀNA BUDDHISM

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1. PRELIMINARY REMARKS

Before stepping into the labyrinth of Buddhist meditation and the beginnings of Mahāyāna, a few words about the origins of this paper will shed some light on its aims and, more important, on its limitations. The cause 'to blame' for this very preliminary study¹ goes back to the kind invitation received from Professor Paul Harrison to contribute to a panel on early Mahāyāna and Mahāyānasūtras at the 12th Conference of the International Association of Buddhist Studies (Lausanne, 1999). The subject chosen is related to a long-standing (predominantly theoretical) interest in meditation as well as to the arch-question tormenting so many students of Indian Buddhism: the birth of Mahāyāna. This paper attempts to discuss the relationship between the two. The first part of the article is mainly dedicated to one technical aspect of meditation which seems to have played a crucial role in early Mahāyāna: the meanings of *samādhi* and its intricate connections with *dhyāna(pāramitā)*. The discussion is largely limited to the *Prajñāpāramitā* corpus and, more or less, related texts. The survey is, unfortunately, far from being exhaustive and not backed up by extensive philological work. The second part of the article, which deals with the rise of the Great Vehicle movement and the role of the spiritual cultivation in this process, admittedly indulges in building up a largely speculative hypothesis. I must confess from the beginning that the relation between the two parts of my article is not one of strict implication. What I say in the first part of the paper is not a direct and definitive proof of the scenario put forward in its second part. It is, nevertheless, one of the many pieces needed to reconstruct the *Sitz im Leben* of spiritual cultivation and its role in the rise of Mahāyāna. The hypothesis formulated in relation to the origins of the Great Vehicle is, admittedly, not dramatically new and is far from taking into account the multitude of facets involved in this process. Even if this modest attempt fails in putting forward a convincing narrative concerning the beginnings of Mahāyāna, there will always remain the consolation that it may succeed in adding a few more questions and doubts regarding this intricate historical problem.

I must thank Professor Harrison not only for giving me the chance to join his panel but also for having 'interrupted my dogmatic slumber'² with his challenging hypothesis on the central role of the ascetic monks in the birth of the Great Vehicle :

Far from being the products of an urban, lay, devotional movement, many Mahāyāna *sūtras* give evidence of a hard-core ascetic attempt to return to the original inspiration of Buddhism, the search for Buddhahood or awakened

cognition. (Harrison 1995, 65)

Previous to my encounter with this essay, my understanding had been under the spell of Akira Hirakawa's theories which stress the pivotal role played by laity in the formation of Mahāyāna Buddhism (cf., for instance, Hirakawa 1974, vol.1, pp.326-352; 1990, vol.2, pp.443-501).³ The ascetic-centrality hypothesis put forward by Harrison was not only new and stimulating but it also prompted me to start looking at this possibility from another angle. If ascetic communities were behind many of the early Mahāyāna sutras, then these sources should contain substantial material on spiritual cultivation (*bhāvanā*). What is then the meditation the early *bodhisattvas* practised or, at least, expounded in their scriptures? How different was it from the Śrāvakayāna tradition? Such an investigation could eventually shed light on the beginnings of the Great Vehicle. If not proper light, which is almost hopeless in the history of Indian Buddhism, then we should be content even with a dim glow. There is no doubt that this historical process must have been very complex, and an overall picture of the multiform religious phenomenon called Mahāyāna should take into account far more data and perspectives. Gregory Schopen's description of early Mahāyāna as 'a loose federation of a number of distinct though related cults' (Schopen 1975, 181) appears to be justifiably becoming a classical definition.⁴ Actually, even Hirakawa's theories, the trendiest target of the critics of the laity-centrality hypothesis, are far from being simple, and a number of his findings and insights retain, I believe, their persuasive power.

Before tackling these problems, we need to clarify our historical and textual background. Early Mahāyāna refers here to the period between the 1st century BCE and the 5th century CE. Following Shizutani (1974, 274) and Nakamura (1980, 152), I also use the term proto-Mahāyāna, roughly covering the age between 100 BCE and 100 CE, to describe the transitional and incipient stage of the movement. In choosing the 5th century as the *terminus ante quem* of early Mahāyāna, I am largely indebted to Gregory Schopen's findings. In an excellent lecture delivered at Otani University (Kyoto) in 1996⁵, Schopen convincingly argued that most of the earliest epigraphic evidence of Mahāyāna dates back to the 5th/6th centuries. Before this time⁶ and even during this period the Great Vehicle appears to have been a geographically and institutionally marginal presence in India (Schopen 1996, 13-14). The emergence of Mahāyāna as 'a clearly identifiable named group having its own monasteries' coincides with the decline and eventual disappearance of inscriptional references to the old Mainstream monastic orders (Schopen 1996, 15).⁷ The 5th century as the *terminus ante quem* of this period also tallies with the history of Buddhist thought. This is the age when Asaṅga and Vasubandhu (or the authors and redactors going under their names) roughly finalise the systematisation of the Yogācāra philosophy. Their work also sets the tone of the predominantly epistemological and logical trend, which aside from the Tantric developments, is to characterise the next seven or eight centuries of Buddhist doctrinal history in India.

Turning now to philological details, most of the texts discussed here come from the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature and related Mahāyāna sutras. This does not mean that I have

covered the whole of the discouragingly voluminous *Prajñāpāramitā* corpus which amounts to no less than 40 works (cf. Conze 1978), and, no doubt, runs for thousands and thousands of pages. The term 'related Mahāyāna sutras' is, admittedly, not well-defined but it refers here to texts like the *Samādhirāja-sūtra*, *Śūraṅgamasamādhi-sūtra*, etc. Except a few remarks, I shall not touch upon meditation in works like the *Saddharmapuṇḍarika*, Pure Land scriptures, visualisation sutras, etc., which, as explained below, are based on different approaches and understanding of what spiritual cultivation is.

Now, how far back in time do our texts actually take us? Our earliest solid evidence starts with the Chinese translations of Mahāyāna scriptures in the second half of the 2nd century CE. Any conjecture bearing on a period before this date cannot aspire to reach definitive certainty. Our attempts to put together a plausible jigsaw of apparently disparate events and data are undoubtedly fraught with many questionable inferences, but they, nevertheless, remain our sole way of saying something meaningful about the proto-Mahāyāna period. As long as it retains the caution and modesty required by hypothetical judgement, higher criticism continues to be, I believe, preferable to blind acceptance of tradition or complacent scepticism concerning historical reconstruction.

Though I often employ Sanskrit materials, I am aware that the Mss on which our modern editions are based are often very late.⁸ The extant Sanskrit version of the *Aṣṭa* appears to reflect the redactional development of the text between approximately 645 (Xuanzang's return to China) and 800 (the probable date of Haribhadra's compilation of his *Commentary*) (Kajiyama 1974, vol.2, p.345). Fortunately, it was one of the first Buddhist scriptures to be rendered into Chinese, and it represents the earliest attested stage of a *Prajñāpāramitā* text. Usually known under the title of *Dao xing (boruo) jing* 道行(般若)經, in 10 *juan* 卷, it is almost unanimously attributed by traditional sources and modern scholars⁹ to the Indo-Scythian Lokakṣema. A colophon gives us the exact date of the completion of its translation as 26 October 179 CE (cf. Harrison 1993, 141-144). Careful philological research has revealed that the *Aṣṭa* is the oldest *Prajñāpāramitā* sutra. It has also been surmised that the first two chapters (Conze 1968) or its first chapter (Kajiyoshi 1980) represent the original nucleus out of which the text evolved.¹⁰

The Sanskrit Ms of Recension A of the *Ratnagūṇa* is actually as late as 1174 (Yuyama 1976, X X III ff.; Conze 1960, 37). The *Fo shuo fo mu bao de zang boruoboluomi jing* 佛說佛母寶德藏般若波羅蜜經, in 3 *juan*, the Chinese version of the text is of little help in this case, since it was translated by Faxian 法賢 in 991.¹¹ In spite of our lack of Ms evidence, the *Ratnagūṇa* appears to belong to the earliest strata of *Prajñāpāramitā* literature. Conze (1994, X) considers that the first two chapters of this work represent the original *Prajñāpāramitā* dating back to 100 BCE.¹² According to him, 'the 41 verses of the first two chapters [of the *Ratnagūṇa*] constitute the original *Prajñāpāramitā* which may well go back to 100 B.C.' (Conze 1994, X).¹³ At our present level of knowledge it seems impossible to prove or disprove Conze's view in a definitive way, but it can be justifiably regarded as a plausible

conjecture.¹⁴ Though standing on the quicksand of the higher criticism, my working hypothesis here is that the first two chapters of the *Ratnagūṇa* and the *Aṣṭa* respectively represent the earliest strata of the *Prajñāpāramitā* corpus and, most probably, of the whole Mahāyāna literature. I have, therefore, paid special attention to these fragments in my examination of the spiritual cultivation and the rise of Mahāyāna.

The textual history of the *Pañca* and the *Śata* is far more complicated. According to Kajiyoshi (1980), the *Pañca* lineage developed not as a mere enlargement of the *Aṣṭa* but rather as a commentary (*upadeśa*) attempting to solve from its own peculiar perspective doctrinal points in the *Aṣṭa*.¹⁵ This process culminated in the compilation of the huge *Śata* (Kajiyoshi 1980, 112-114; 723-727).

This is not the place to discuss in detail the textual history of all the scriptures quoted in this paper. A final word on the *Da zhi du lun* 大智度論 (* *Prajñāpāramitopadeśa*)¹⁶, which is much used in this paper, appears, however, to be necessary. The decision to refer to this treatise here may raise some complicated methodological problems.

First, the virtual silence of the Indian tradition in regard to the *Prajñāpāramitopadeśa* may cast doubt on its reliability for our discussion. Despite the traditional attribution and some modern views supporting it (see, for instance, Hikata (1958) and Yinshun (1993)), it is very unlikely that the author of the *Prajñāpāramitopadeśa* is Nāgārjuna. Lamotte (1944-1976, vol. 3, pp.VIII-XLIV) shows, quite convincingly, I believe, that the author¹⁷ must have been a Buddhist scholar 'of Sarvāstivādin formation and Mahāyāna conviction' active in Northwest India at the beginning of the 4th century.¹⁸ The silence of the later Mādhyamika tradition might be explained by the relatively limited geographical transmission of the text in Northwest India and Central Asia which was followed by its early loss and fall into oblivion.

Second, is it historically justifiable to lump together a (relatively) late *sāstra* with the *sūtra* tradition? We have already seen that the *Pañca* and the *Śata* may have actually developed, partially, at least, as exegetically motivated texts. In a brilliant recent contribution, Stefano Zacchetti (1999)¹⁹ has shown that at least some passages in the *Prajñāpāramitopadeśa* seem to be linked to the same commentarial tradition which produced the *Pañca* and the *Śata*. This is a very important finding relevant not only to the present discussion but also to the entire history of the *Prajñāpāramitā* corpus.²⁰ The author's point, convincingly supported by a number of illustrations, can be summed up as follows:

During an analysis of the *Pañca*, where the first seven chapters of the Chinese translations (esp. DWK [i.e. Dharmarakṣa's, Wu Chaolu's, and Kumārajīva's translations respectively]) were compared with the corresponding Sanskrit versions (especially *Pañca-D* [i.e. Dutt's edition] and the *Śata*), I found that, in a number of cases, textual expanded readings, as transmitted in the Sanskrit against DWK(X) [X= Xuanzang's translation], were directly anticipated by the DZDL [i.e. *Da zhidu lun*]. (p.2)

My hypothesis is that they [i.e. these passages] probably were not composed by

the author of the DZDL (whoever he was): rather they very likely represent a certain generic exegetical tradition handed down (perhaps orally [...]) along with the *sūtra*, and, by chance, partially collected in the DZDL...(p.8)

(The explanations or additions in the square brackets belong to me.)

Obviously, not the entire *Prajñāpāramitopadeśa* can be linked to this exegetical tradition²¹, and many passages undoubtedly represent the creative work of its final author(s). At the present state of our knowledge it is very hard, if not impossible, to make distinctions between, on the one hand, tradition-handed views reflecting an early doctrinal stage, maybe close to the formation period of texts like the *Āṣṭa*, the *Pañca*, etc. and, on the other hand, late commentarial developments. Nevertheless, the *Prajñāpāramitopadeśa* remains a very useful tool when dealing with the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature and philosophy. It is my working hypothesis here that this commentary provides not only much needed clarifications but it may, at least occasionally, reflect earlier exegetical traditions. With this proviso in mind, I think that the *Prajñāpāramitopadeśa* can still be used in our discussion on meditation in the early *Prajñāpāramitā* texts.

2. *DHYĀNA* AND *SAMĀDHI* IN THE *PRAJÑĀPĀRAMITĀ* LITERATURE

What kind of meditation did the early Mahāyāna *bodhisattvas* practise? It is very risky to generalise, especially after a preliminary exploration of the sources, but I shall, nevertheless, venture to say a few words about the spiritual cultivation in general in the early Great Vehicle. Although Śrāvākayāna and Mahāyāna share a basic common heritage of meditative practices and ideas, differences between the two traditions cannot be denied. The distinctively Mahāyāna innovations apparently evolved into two main directions.

On the one hand, we have basically traditional Śrāvākayāna meditative practices which are reinterpreted in the light of the *Prajñāpāramitā* relativism, with special emphasis on the idea of practising without a support and the complete negation of attachment to rapture.²² The ideal is a state of emptiness (*śūnyatā*), signlessness (*ānimitta*), and directionlessness (*apraṇihita*).²³ This is mainly characteristic of the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature and will form the object of my inquiry here. Despite the plethora of *samādhis*, some of them presumably actual concentration methods or states, some of them emblematic names for doctrinal goals, the main innovative effort of this trend was not directed towards the creation of new meditative techniques. Its chief contribution rather appears to lie in a new hermeneutic approach towards the spiritual cultivation. The most important point here is not what a *bodhisattva* practises, and usually he works with traditional methods and categories²⁴, but how he practises, to be more precise, how he practices without practising.²⁵

On the other hand, we have visualisation sutras mainly, but not exclusively, associated with the Pure Land Buddhism.²⁶ I would venture to speculate that this trend originated in

technical elaborations upon the various psychological signs (*nimitta*) obtained in meditation coupled with a strongly devotional form of Buddha recollection (*buddhānusmṛti*). At the risk of being schematic in the extreme, we could say that the Prajñāpāramitā stream emphasised the *ānimitta* aspect as its main spiritual practice and goal while the visualisation sutras developed and idealised the *nimitta* aspect as the key to attaining the Buddhist *summum bonum*. Of course, this is a theoretical simplification and in reality we have a variety of positions. The relativist Prajñāpāramitā current is far from being devoid of visualisation and devotional passages. One of the main results and aims of the *bodhisattva*'s meditation is gaining direct access to countless Buddha lands (*buddha-kṣetra*) and worshipping each of their Buddhas. At the other extreme of the spectrum, a visualisation sutra like the *Amitāyurbuddhadhyāna-sūtra* teaches that the contemplation of the Pure Land leads to the attainment of the patient acceptance of the non-arising of phenomena (*anutpattika-dharma-kṣānti* 無生法忍, T12.341c22). A case in between, one is almost tempted to say a category in itself, is the *Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra*. After a description of a what appears to be a visualisation technique (T13.904b-905c; Harrison 1978, 21(section 2D)-36 (section 3L)), the Lord tells Bhadrupāla that the Tathāgatas seen in *samādhi* are nothing but mental products because things appear as we imagine them ('*di ltar bdag ji lat ji ltar rnam par rtog pa de lta de ltar snang ngo*) (Harrison 1978, 36(section 3L)). The thought itself is declared to have no substantial existence (*dnegos po med pa*=**abhāva*) (Harrison 1978, 36-7(section 3M)).²⁷

There is no doubt that the *Prajñāpāramitā* sutras show a great degree familiarity with the traditional meditation techniques and the framework of the spiritual path (see, for instance, *Aṣṭadaśa*, vol. 2, pp. 19-21; *Pañca*, 203-210; etc.). As mentioned above, the basic novelty lies in their interpretation. Chapter 1, verses 9-10, of the *Ratnagaṇa* (pp. 10-11) can be said to represent the archetype of the Prajñāpāramitā treatment of meditation both in terms of chronology and philosophical approach. On the one hand, concentration is not denied and is held to play an important psychological role. The *bodhisattva* with his mind set on non-production experiences the most excellent of the tranquil concentrations (*an-upādu-dhīḥ spṛśati śānta-samādhi śreṣṭhām*. Verse 10). Dwelling pacified in himself, he receives his prediction of Buddhahood from the previous Tathāgatas (*evātma-śānta viharann iha bodhisattvo, so vyākṛto purimakehi tathāgatehi*. Verse 11). On the other hand, his knowledge of the highest truth of the emptiness of all phenomena makes him non-dependant upon concentration. The *bodhisattva* does not mind whether he is in or out of concentration because he knows perfectly the *dharma*-original nature (*na ca manyate ahu samāhītu vyutthito vā, kasmārtha dharma-prakṛtiṃ parijānayatīvā*. Verse 11).

We find the same philosophical and psychological role assigned to meditation in the first chapter of Lokakṣema's Chinese translation of the *Aṣṭa*:

For the *bodhisattva mahāsattva*, all designations and phenomena are not grasped.²⁸ Therefore, [this] *samādhi* (**sarvadharmānupādāno nāma samādhīḥ*)²⁹ is infinite and beyond measure.³⁰ It cannot be known by *arhats*

and *pratyekabuddhas*.^{3 1} Those *bodhisattvas mahāsattvas* who follow this *samādhi* will quickly obtain Buddhahood.^{3 2}

By Buddha's magnificent power, Subhūti thus spoke: 'All *bodhisattvas* who have attained the stage of non-regression (**avivartika*)^{3 3} and have obtained [the prediction of] reaching Buddhahood from the Buddhas of the past follow this *samādhi*, but they do not perceive [this] *samādhi*, do not conceive of [this] *samādhi*, do not practise [this] *samādhi*, do not think of [this] *samādhi*, do not wish to sit in [this] *samādhi*, and do not say "[this is] my *samādhi*." He who follows this *dharma* [i.e. way of practice] will have no doubts.'^{3 4}

菩薩摩訶薩一切字法不受。是故三昧無有邊無有正。諸阿羅漢辟支佛所不能及知。菩薩摩訶薩隨三昧者疾得作佛。持佛威神、須菩提說是語：“菩薩皆得阿惟越致字、前過去佛時得作佛、隨三昧亦不見三昧、亦有無三昧想、亦不作三昧、亦不念識三昧、亦不想識坐三昧、亦不言我三昧。已隨是法者無有疑。” (T8.426c18-25).

Apparently at an early date, Mahāyāna authors subsumed the traditional practice of trances (*dhyāna*), attainments (*samāpatti*), etc. under the perfection of meditation (*dhyānapāramitā*).^{3 5} It is possible that, as Hirakawa suggests, in the earliest stages of Mahāyāna the six perfections were regarded as equal^{3 6}, but even the oldest *Prajñāpāramitā* texts already regard the *dhyānapāramitā* as well as the other perfections as subordinated to and contained in the *prajñāpāramitā* (*Aṣṭa(M)*, 81; cf. also 310). To be sure, the role of the perfection of meditation is not denied, and the *Prajñāpāramitopadeśa* (T25.180b) declares that the power of *dhyāna* can help the *bodhisattva* swallow the medicine of *prajñā*. A careless practice of meditation, however, can have disastrous effects for the *bodhisattva*'s career. The greatest concern is that spiritual practices, especially those of an ensatatic nature, like *dhyānas* and *samāpattis*, can seriously preclude the *bodhisattva* from achieving his noble cause of universal salvation. Not only that *dhyāna* is a solitary and self-centred practice but it also determines the sphere of the practitioner's future rebirth, which, for the proficient meditator, will automatically be outside the realm of desire (*kāmadhātu*). The *bodhisattva* must, therefore, master the *dhyānas* and *samāpattis* without receiving their usual karmic fruit (*Aṣṭa(M)*, 332; 427; *Aṣṭadaśa*, vol1, pp.94-5; 100). He acquires the perfection of meditation entering the nine successive states of attainment but 'he does not cling to the level of *śrāvakas* or *pratyekabuddhas*, and he [practises meditation thinking], "Having stood in the perfection of concentration, I must now liberate all beings from the cycle of rebirths" (*na ca śrāvakabhūmiṃ vā prtyekabuddhabhūmiṃ adhyālabate. anyatrāsyāivam bhavati. iha mayā samādhipāramitāyāṃ sthitvā sarvasattvā saṃsārāt parimocayitavyā iti. Aṣṭadaśa*, vol1, pp.94-5).

The author of the *Prajñāpāramitopadeśa*, in a passage listing eighteen characteristics of the Mahāyāna *dhyānapāramitā* (T25.187c-190a), appears to be very eager to prove that

despite its ensatic aspects and periods of seclusion required by its practice, the *bodhisattva*'s meditation is an efficient method and integral part of the great being's messianic mission. To give only two examples here, the *bodhisattva* practises meditation in order to teach the inner bliss of *dhyāna* and *samāpatti* to those beings attached to exterior pleasures (T25.187c). He practises 'the **bodhisattva-dhyāna* which does not forsake the living beings' 不捨衆生菩薩禪 and 'in *dhyāna* he always generates thoughts of great compassion (*mahākaruṇā-citta*) 禪中皆發大悲心 (T25.188a6-7). In order to make friendliness and compassion possible in a practice dominated by ensatic states, the *Prajñāpāramitopadeśa* operates a technical innovation inconceivable from the viewpoint of the traditional Śrāvakayāna doctrine. 'The *bodhisattva* practising the *dhyānapāramitā* enters the successive *dhyāna* stages with thoughts of the realm of desire (*kāma-dhātu*) 菩薩行禪波羅蜜。於欲界心次第入禪。' (T25.188b3-4). This opens the way for extravagant displays of the psychological virtuosity of blending trance-states and active preaching. 'The *bodhisattva* always dwells in the *dhyāna*, concentrates his thoughts, remains unmoved, does not generate coarse observation (*vitarka*) and subtle examination (*vicāra*) and [yet] at the [same] time he preaches the Dharma with countless voices to all living beings in the ten directions and liberates them. 爾時菩薩常入禪定。攝心不動不生覺觀。亦能為十方一切衆生以無量音聲說法而脫之。' (T25.188c9-11)³⁷

The *Vimalkīrtinirdeśa* goes as far as to declare that the correct practice of solitary meditation (*pratisamīlīna*) is not withdrawing from the attainment of cessation (**nirodhasamāpatti*)³⁸ and yet displaying ordinary behaviour.³⁹ (Chinese translation:不起滅定而現諸威儀。是為宴坐。T14.539c21-22, T14.561b14-15⁴⁰; Tibetan translation: *ji ltar 'gog pa*⁴¹ *las kyang mi ldang zhing spyod lam kun tu yang snang bar 'gyur ba de ltar nang du yang dag gzhas par gyis shig* | P34.Bu190a4)

Let us now see what our texts have to tell about *samādhi*, one of the new leading 'stars' in Mahāyāna literature. In terms of spiritual cultivation, the attainment of the unsurpassed perfect Awakening (*anuttara-samyak-sambodhi*) is, presumably, neither a simple intellectual act of understanding nor a complete self-abandon to enstatic states. For the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature authors, it was a matter of paramount importance that wisdom should lead and control all the other perfections. Alongside innovations in defining the nature of *dhyāna*, they elaborated upon and reinterpreted another old spiritual alley. The four *dhyānas*, the core of the *dhyānapāramitā*, are considered to include all other aspects of spiritual cultivation: the five supernatural powers (*abhijñā*), the four states of mental sameness (*sammaccitta*), the eight deliverances (*vimokṣa*), the ten totalities (*kṛtsnāyatana*), the *bodhisattva*'s *samādhis* 諸菩薩三昧, amounting to 108 or 120 varieties, etc. (*Prajñāpāramitopadeśa*, T25.185b; 187c). Amongst all these practices, it seems that early Mahāyāna chose to stress particularly *samādhi* as the ideal form of spiritual cultivation or cognitive perfection. To start with, the term was polysemic even in the early Canon⁴², and its wide semantic sphere must have served perfectly well the creative purposes and, probably, the psychological experimentation of the *Prajñāpāramitā* followers. Furthermore, it was an ideal term related both to *dhyāna* and

prajñā.

The popularity of *samādhi* in the Great Vehicle⁴³ is witnessed by the impressive number of concentrations as well as sutras dedicated to them. The most popular and well-defined ones appear to be the three concentrations which will be dealt with below. The number of *samādhis* varies from 58 (*Aṣṭa(M)*, 490-2) to 108 (*Pañca*, 142-4 and 198-203)⁴⁴, 115 (*Śata*, 825-835), 118 (*Mahāvvyūtpatti*, 40-49, under the heading *prajñāpāramitodbhāvita samādhi nāmāni*), 121 (*Śata*, 1412-1426), etc.⁴⁵ The poetic frenzy of the sutras often made the number acquire hyperbolic digits. Other passages in the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature mention hundreds of thousands (T8.1a26; T8.217a28) or millions of *samādhis* (T8.842b3). The *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* (p. 424)⁴⁶ speaks of hundreds of thousands of *koṭis* of *samādhis* equal to the sands of the Ganges. The *Prajñāpāramitopadeśa* explains 14 representative *samādhis* (T25.268b-c) and then declares their number infinite 無量 (T25.268c). Do we have here a process of gradual growth from a relatively limited number of concentrations to hyperbolic digits? As with many other processes of historical development, we can certainly assume that a gradual enlargement took place, but, on the other hand, the Śrāvakayāna tradition does not lack completely the rhetoric of astronomic numbers. The *Mahāvibhāṣā*, for instance, says that 'if one classifies according to continuity (**saṃtāna*) and momentariness (**kṣaṇa*), then there is an infinite number of *samādhis*.' 若以相續剎那分別、則有無量三摩地。 (T27.538a26-7). It is, however, difficult to draw conclusions as to whether our Mahāyāna texts were influenced by an Abhidharmic tradition or we have to deal here with a completely independent growth.⁴⁷

Whatever the origin of the infinite number of concentrations may be, more important for our discussion here is to consider whether these *samādhis* actually refer to specific meditative techniques. The texts are not very clear and generous in details. It appears, however, that apart from some well-attested methods, many of these *samādhis* represent rather stylistic devices stressing the fact that the apprehension of the most profound aspects of reality must be connected with a state of concentration.⁴⁸ The *Samādhirāja-sūtra* lists hundreds of qualifications and merits of 'the *samādhi* that is manifested as the sameness of the essential nature of all *dharma*s' (*sarva-dharma-svabhāva-samatā-vipaṇcita-samādhi*)⁴⁹, but there is no clearly identifiable meditative technique which can be singled out as this particular *samādhi*. The word appears to denote a 'cognitive experience of emptiness' covering a wide variety of senses, including the sutra itself (Gómez et al. 1989, 16). Similarly, in spite of the huge number of theoretical and rhetorical considerations on the *samādhi* which gives its title, the *Śūraṅgamasamādhi-sūtra* contains only one brief passage on how the '*samādhi* of the heroic march' should be practised (T15.463b21-c5; P32.331b2-332a4): the *bodhisattva* should 'contemplate all phenomena as empty 空, with no resistance (無所障礙 *apratigha*)⁵⁰, perishing with each [moment of] thought 念念滅盡, without aversion or passion 離於憎愛'. We have here rather a general statement of a basic refrain of the Mahāyāna *Weltanschauung* supposedly realised in a state of deep concentration. Furthermore, the text adds that the way of practising this *samādhi* is not singular and its actual method of cultivation depends upon the

functioning of the mind and mental concomitants (心・心所行 **citta-caitta pravṛtti*) of each living being.^{5 1}

The central and perhaps the oldest form of *samādhi* in the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature appears to be the set^{5 2} known as ‘the three concentrations’ (*trayaḥ samādhyah* 三三昧)^{5 3}, i.e. the emptiness concentration (*śūnyatā-samādhi*), the signless concentration (*ānimitta-samādhi*), and the directionless concentration (*apraṇihita-samādhi*). They correspond more or less to the traditional three gates of liberation (*trīṇi-vimokṣa-mukhāni* 三解脱門).^{5 4} This triad might have played the role of a bridge between the two Vehicles by providing the proto-Mahāyāna ascetics with a preliminary epistemic model of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) and signlessness (*ānimitta*) which ultimately laid the foundations of the Great Vehicle paradigm shift.^{5 5} The *Pañca* (p.208)^{5 6} and the *Śata* (p.1440) use the same definition for the three concentrations as the *Ekottarāgama* (T2.630b) (Lamotte 1944-1976, 1213).^{5 7}

There are, nevertheless, differences in the way Mahāyāna authors conceive the three *samādhis*. The most important is the practise of these concentrations without hypostasization^{5 8}: ‘The *bodhisattva*, the great being, practising the perfection of wisdom, does not connect [his actual practice of] emptiness with the emptiness [conceived of as an entity]; [therefore, for him] there is no binding to emptiness.’ (*bodhisattvo mahāsattvaḥ prajñāpāramitāyām caran na śūnyatām śūnyatayā yojayati na śūnyatāyogam. Pañca*, 48; cf. also p.52).^{5 9} And the same goes true for signlessness and directionlessness. The three *samādhis* are considered virtually identical with the practice of the perfection of wisdom and are declared the most exalted form of cultivation^{6 0} (*niruttaro hy eṣaḥ Śāriputra yogo yad uta prajñāpāramitāyogaḥ śūnyatāyogaḥ ānimittayogaḥ apraṇihitayogaḥ. Pañca*, 58-9; T8.224c23-4).^{6 1} This spiritual omnipotence^{6 2} makes them so effective that the *bodhisattva*’s career as a saviour for aeons is menaced. They can potentially trigger a speedy Awakening but if this is achieved before the completion of the *bodhisattva*’s vows, then it amounts to the falling to the level of *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas* (*Aṣṭa(M)*, 310). The *bodhisattva* must dwell in the concentrations of emptiness, signlessness, and directionlessness without actually realising them (*na sāṅgātakaroti*). Their complete attainment would mean the realisation of the reality-limit (*bhūta-koṭi*) (*Aṣṭa(M)*, 373-9; *Aṣṭa(W)*, 749-61).^{6 3} The *bodhisattva* should be like a bird in the air or like a skilful archer who shoots upwards one arrow and then keeps on shooting arrows in order to stop the fall of the first one (*Aṣṭa(M)*, 374; *Aṣṭa(W)*, 754-5).^{6 4} To achieve this the *bodhisattva*, basing himself upon friendliness directed towards all living beings, ties himself to them, transcends whatever belongs to defilements and Māra^{6 5} as well as the stages of *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas*, and abides in the concentration of emptiness, etc.^{6 6} (*yasmin samaye Subhūte bodhisattvo mahāsattvaḥ sarvasattvānām antike maitricittam ārambaṇi-kṛtya tān paramayā maitryā paribadhnāti atrāntare bodhisattvo mahāsattvaḥ kleṣapakṣaṁ mārapakṣaṁ ca atikramya śrāvakabhūmiṁ pratyekabuddhabhūmiṁ ca atikramya tatra samādhāv avatiṣṭhate. Aṣṭa(M)*, 373-4; *Aṣṭa(W)*, 754).^{6 7}

The *Prajñāpāramitopadeśa*, which dedicates a long passage to the three *samādhis* 三三

昧 (T25.206a-8a), considers these concentrations to be a very particular and extremely powerful type of wisdom (*prajñā*). When the interlocutor asks our author why these forms of *prajñā* are called *samādhi*, the latter answers: 'If these three types of wisdom are not established in concentration, they become mad wisdom (**unmattaprajñā*).^{6 8} Many would [thus] fall into vicious doubts (**mithyāsāṅkā*), and they could not [practise] anymore. [But] if [these types of wisdom] are established in concentration, then they can destroy all defilements (*kleśa*) and obtain the true characteristic (*bhūtalakṣaṇa*) of phenomena. 是三種智慧若不住定中、則是狂慧。多墮邪疑、無所能作。若住定中、則能破諸煩惱、得諸法實相。' (T25.20618-21). The treatise uses a simile to explain the mental functions involved in the three *samādhis*: 'When a king 王 arrives, he necessarily has with him his chief minister 大臣 and his attendants 營從^{6 9}. The *samādhi* is like the king, the wisdom like the chief minister, and the other *dharma*s like the attendants' (T25.207a8-9). Although the three concentrations are declared to be a type of wisdom, their actual practice appears to be interwoven with the *dhyāna*. They are said to be found on nine or eleven *dhyāna* stages (地 *bhūmi*) according to whether we regard them as always pure (有漏 *anāsrava*) or as sometimes pure and sometimes impure (無漏 *sāsrava*) respectively (T25.207a23-b2).^{7 0}

This is the basic picture offered by our texts. It seems that two major doctrinal concerns stand out as paramount for their authors. The first one, hugely sensitive for the Great Vehicle followers, is how a *bodhisattva* can engage in meditation, especially in the cultivation of enstatic states as well as emptiness, signlessness, and directionlessness, without losing his salvific involvement. The second one, which Mahāyāna inherited from earlier Buddhism, is how and to what degree non-discursive cognitive modes can be combined with rational observational thinking in order to attain the supreme Awakening. The Mahāyāna texts and followers usually assure us that they can successfully solve these problems. The *bodhisattva* can balance and even fuse his meditation practice with his immense compassion and messianic career. We are told that his spiritual techniques, especially *samādhi*, can subtly blend *dhyāna* with *prajñā*.

The task of a self-effacing, purely descriptive historian (if such a person can be said to exist) should perhaps come to an end here. I cannot, however, resist the temptation to ask two more philosophical questions. How can one engaged in the three *samādhis*, which by definition exclude all types of entities, characteristics, and mental orientation, **simultaneously** feel compassion and friendliness towards all living beings?^{7 1} How is it possible to fuse *dhyāna* and *prajñā*? I am certainly aware of the immense difficulty of the question. Any attempt to answer such questions will transcend the realm of philologico-historical studies and land us in the field of the philosophy and psychology of religion. Even if an answer, let alone a certain one, may not be possible, the question will, nevertheless, satisfy a basic human need to discuss such propositions not only in terms of ascertaining their mere occurrence in historical sources but also in relation to truth-values. After all, these propositions admittedly try to say something about the essence of reality and human mind. Furthermore, the discussion

of their truth-value will, in turn, help a more critically engaged (and by necessity no longer 'purely descriptive') historian to judge the role and development of these ideas.

Let me sketch out a brief answer to the first question. Do we have here a dogmatic patchwork meant to accommodate two basically incompatible practices, i.e. ensatic states and active social involvement? Or do we have to deal with spiritual modes and states which cannot be known and assessed by means of our normal epistemic categories? The traditional Buddhist answer would obviously favour the latter solution. After all, deluded *prthagjanas*, to which I undoubtedly belong, have no right to pass judgements on such lofty states which they cannot experience. The only alternative is, we would be told, to become *bodhisattvas* ourselves. With no foreseeable plans to embark upon this noble enterprise myself and, what is even worse, starting from different philosophical presuppositions, I am not willing to accept this position without strong reservations. This is not the place to develop a full-fledged epistemic dialogue with Buddhism, but as far as our normal understanding of psychological states (including and accepting the altered states of consciousness) as well as the basic requirements of logical consistency goes, it is very hard to believe that one can experience **simultaneously** states of gradual decrease and eventual cessation of all discursive and emotional functions, on the one hand, and intense mental, verbal, and bodily activities for the salvation of the sentient beings, on the other. I rather tend to regard this as an instance of tension between what Schmithausen (1999)^{7 2} aptly calls the two poles of Buddhist spirituality, i.e. detachment (*vimucacati*, *nibbindati*, *virajjati*, *upekkhā/upekṣā*) and caring for others (*karuṇā*, *kāruṇṇa*, *dayā*, *anukampā*), in Śrāvakayāna, and emptiness (*śūnyatā*) and compassion (*karuṇā*), in Mahāyāna. In his excellent lecture, Schmithausen argues that while there is no doubt that these poles represent the two fundamental pillars of Buddhism, the actual relation, psychological and doctrinal, between them is not as simple as it may appear.^{7 3} Though early Buddhism regards sympathy (*kāruṇṇa*) as an important virtue, it does not consider it as 'an automatic effect of the awakening experience of the Buddha or even an inevitable outflow of *any* liberating experience' (p.6). We even see 'a certain tension between, on the one hand, the state of liberation characterized by *detachment* and, on the other, becoming *involved* in activity for the sake of others' (p.11). The Mahāyāna ideal of universal salvation brings new developments and nuances in the relation between the two poles, but the tension does not come to end. The *Prajñāpāramitā* literature in particular presents the *samādhis* of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) and 'transphenomenality' (*ānimitta*) as extremely potent and able to lead directly to the attainment of Buddhahood, which, when too premature, would compromise the salvific career of the *bodhisattva*. Schmithausen refers here to Chapter 20 of the *Aṣṭa*, which we have also discussed above. Here the *bodhisattva* 'should only become familiar with them [the *samādhis*], but he must not prematurely realize (*sākṣāt-kṛ*) them, he must not "fall" (*pat*) into them' (p.17). Together with this careful practice, he must counterbalance these *samādhis* by cultivating benevolence or compassion with regard to all living beings (ibid.). The tension between the full awakening and salvific activity appears to be implicitly recognised by the texts themselves.

The solution suggested here is basically one of balanced but separate practice of the two poles. The passages from the *Prajñāpāramitopadeśa* and the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* discussed above seem to take a further step: meditative ensatic states, presumably quite potent and traditionally seen as part of the path towards liberation, are now said to include compassion, thoughts of the realm of desire, and normal behaviour. This *coincidentia oppositorum* represents a new step in the attempt to solve the underlying tension between the two poles. As an avowedly hopeless *prthagjana*, I find this development a doctrinally motivated move meant to portray the exalted ideal of the *bodhisattva*'s messianic mission rather than a psychological reality.

What about the *dhyāna* and *prajñā* fusion? This possibility is actually mentioned not only in relation with the three *samādhis* but also with the supremacy and comprehensive nature of the perfection of wisdom. The *Ratnaguṇa* declares that 'for those accomplished in the practice of the perfection of wisdom, all perfections are comprised in it (*prajñāya pāramitā-sikṣita-saṃskṛtānām*^{7 4}, *sarve ca pāramitā bhont' iha saṃgrhītāḥ*/ chapter XXV, verse 4, p.100). In a parallel passage, the *Aṣṭa* says: 'Subhūti, for the *bodhisattva*, the great being, thus practising the perfection of wisdom, all perfections are included in it' (*evam eva Subhūte prajñāpāramitāyām śikṣamāṇasya bodhisattvasya mahāsattvasya tasyām sarvāḥ pāramitā antargatā bhavanti. Aṣṭa(M)*, p. 431, *Aṣṭa(W)*, p. 825; Lokakṣema's translation: 須菩提、菩薩摩訶薩如是學深般若波羅蜜、總攝諸波羅蜜。T8.357c19-21). Could we see it as a psychological reality, i.e. not only as a doctrinal ideal but also as an actual spiritual experience? To start with, there is no way we can ascertain this by means of philologico-historical methods. Furthermore, the answer to this question largely depends on how *prajñā* is understood. Even if we limit ourselves to one scripture or one class of texts, the exact definition of *prajñā* would require a study in itself. To make things more complicated, the texts themselves warn us that a purely theoretical understanding of the concept is impossible and its elusiveness is part of its nature. Despite all difficulties, I would risk a very general definition and say that *prajñā* is a subtle cognitive process which presupposes both an intuitive grasp of the reality and a high degree of awareness with no emotional support, i.e. attachment. Whatever the subtle relation between the non-discursive realisation and awareness may be, I do not think that *prajñā* is a cessation of all mental functions as the *nirodhasamāpatti*.^{7 5} To the extant *prajñā* could be said to be an underlying attitude pervading the ascetic's life, I do not find it impossible to speak of its combination with *dhyāna* or any other practice. Problems of logical consistency (I only mean *prthagjana* logic) may, however, arise if we take *dhyāna* as a gradual decrease of emotional and cognitive activity culminating with *nirodhasamāpatti*. If this is the case, as in the passage from the *Prajñāpāramitopadeśa* which links the practice of the three concentrations to the nine or eleven *dhyāna* stages (地 *bhūmi*) (T25.207a23-b2), then the precise connection between *dhyāna* and *prajñā* becomes very difficult to explain. It may actually echo the relation between enstatic meditation (*śamatha*) and observational concentration (*vipaśyanā*) present since early Buddhism. Later scholastic tradition, Śrāvakayāna and Mahāyāna alike, have always portrayed *śamatha* and

vipaśyanā as being in a state of balance and harmony. This view has been shared by many modern Buddhist and scholars. Studies like, to give only two examples, those of Cousins (1984) and Kōchi (1973) actually stress this aspect.^{7 6} The relation between *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* has, however, not always been that of a perfect marriage. The early canon records clashes between monks who practice the *jhāna*-meditation (*jhāyī bhikkhū*) and monks who are attached to the doctrine (*dhammāyogā bhikkhū*) (ANIII355-6). The relation between the 'rationalist' trend and the 'mystic' current, epitomised by Musīla and Nārada, was the subject of a classical study published by La Vallée Poussin in 1937. The attempt to harmonise the tension between the two paths has often been done by what Schmithausen, using Hacker's term, aptly calls "inclusivism", i.e. a method of intellectual debate in which the competing doctrine, or essential elements of it, are admitted but relegated to a subordinate position' (Schmithausen 1981, 223). The process of relegating enstatic techniques to the role of ancillary or soteriologically irrelevant practices as found in the *Abhidharmakośa* and *Abhidharmasamuccaya* was brilliantly analysed by Griffiths (1983).^{7 7} Though the relation between *dhyāna* and *prajñā* is much more complicated^{7 8}, we could, nevertheless, discover some reflections of the older *śamatha* and/vs. *vipaśyanā* pair.^{7 9}

3. MEDITATION AND THE BEGINNINGS OF MAHĀYĀNA BUDDHISM

Whatever the *bodhisattva*'s spiritual cultivation may actually have been, it seems to me very unlikely that those men coming up with such complex and subtle innovations were simple lay people with a mere populist desire to make the new Vehicle open for a general 'easy ride'. The background seems to be that of an ascetic and philosophical milieu perfectly familiar with the doctrinal developments of the traditional Buddhism. Although the promise to become a Buddha was theoretically open to everybody, the way to do it was by no means simple to understand and practise. The people writing these texts were not anti-traditionalist, anti-elite laymen simply interested in proclaiming their rhetoric of the democratic superiority of the Great Vehicle over the Lesser Vehicle. It is true that their hermeneutic or innovative efforts sometimes had iconoclast fervour and smashing effects, but all these did not stem from ignorance or mere despise of the scholastic tradition. Basically, they were motivated, I believe, by a different philosophical outlook which must have grown gradually from within the Buddhist *saṅgha* itself.

Looking for the roots, or, at least, part of the roots of Mahāyāna into ascetic communities is basically a variety of the old hypothesis which regards the rise of the Great Vehicle as a gradual development from the traditional schools (*nikāyas*), usually from the more liberal and progressive Mahāsāṅghika group. Bareau's view on the origins of Mahāyāna (1955, 296-305) seems to me one of the most sensible formulations of the this theory.^{8 0} The French scholar outlines quite a number of similarities existing between the Mahāsāṅghikas

and the Great Vehicle (Bareau 301-304). He concludes, 'are there among the sects of the Lesser Vehicle ontological theses showing clearly Mahāyānist tendencies? To this question we can give an affirmative answer with all certitude.[...] The sects in question all belong to the Mahāsāṅghika group' (p.303). Backed up by a careful methodological treatment, the image of ascetic communities, doctrinally starting from a predominantly Mahāsāṅghika background, can better explain many, if not most, of the facets of the Mahāyāna rise.

At this point I must clarify a crucial methodological problem which underlies not only my presuppositions here but also many other studies dealing with Buddhist history. Although I surmise that some philosophical developments may have been the result of a doctrinal contrivance, as often pointed out above, there also instances in which I believe we could speak of a such a thing as real ascetic practice and that some passages in our texts seem to reflect it. I must confess that making the distinction between the two is an awfully complex problem but one thing is sure: taking the scriptures at their face value without properly questioning their rhetoric is not going to take us too far in the field of the history of religion. In his recent study on 'Buddhist Modernism and the Rhetoric of Meditative Experience', Robert H. Sharf (1995) makes an excellent contribution to the questioning not only of the tradition itself but also of some of our current research clichés. Sharf's paper is very convincing in deconstructing the concept of 'pure experience' as well as in proving that the modern stress on *zazen* or *vipassanā* is largely an invented tradition (see pp.246-259), which is often subjected to the 'politics of experience' (see pp. 259-265). Sharf also contends that we have too frequently presupposed that meditation must have been the central preoccupation of the traditional monastic life. I quite agree with this position, and I hope that in what follows I shall adduce some extra evidence concerning this. I am also inclined to believe, partly in line with Sharf's argumentation, that Buddhist literature, even its specialised treatises on the spiritual cultivation, do not necessarily reflect the meditative experiences of their own authors.

My working hypothesis is that religious texts, including meditation manuals and treatises, represent an 'intertextuality' of sources and influences ranging from actual inner experiences to external factors. Excluding or favouring one type of sources, without sufficient evidence, can turn out to be methodologically biased. It is actually here that with due respect I would dare to disagree with Sharf and contend that the methodology employed by Schmithausen (1973;1976) may prove, when cautiously handled, a viable avenue for historical research. Sharf criticises the latter study for its methodological attempt to derive the formation of Yogācāra idealism 'from a *generalisation* of a fact observed in the case of meditation-objects, i.e. in the context of *spiritual practice*' (Schmithausen 1976, 241; also quoted by Sharf 1995, 237). Sharf's viewpoint is that 'His [i.e. Schmithausen's] argument does not demonstrate that Yogācāra idealism emerged from reflection on an actual experience, so much as it shows that such a position can be derived from reflection upon the prescriptive meditative and soteriological ideals enunciated in Mahāyāna textual sources' (p.238). He goes on to say that idealism could actually be derived from reflections upon epistemic errors or the ontology

of dreams (*ibid.*). Now, I agree that it is indeed possible that the same generalisation could have been reached starting from different experiences and inferences. But on the other hand, I do not think that deriving a doctrine from inferences occasioned by actual meditative experiences is logically impossible (like, for instance, accepting that a 'married bachelor' is non-contradictory). A love novel may be the result of the author's desire to illustrate a theoretical philosophy as well as originate in a genuine emotional experience. I think that the passages analysed by Schmithausen point in the direction of inferences based on meditative experiences, but I confess that I cannot prove it in an absolutely conclusive way. The reason is that our verifiability principle here stands on a relatively fragile basis. We cannot possibly verify beyond doubt what the actual situation was centuries ago and, therefore, are left with the alternative of carefully reading and interpreting our passages. Especially when it comes to interpretation, many texts are so open that a variety of readings become possible. Even when one interpretation is preferable to others, it rarely happens that the evidence will be absolutely conclusive.

In our case, the bottom line is whether reflection upon spiritual experiences is possible or not. Since Sharf does not deny the psychological possibility of meditative experiences as such (see pp. 259-260), it is hard to understand why he does not accept that one can draw conclusions from one's own experiences and reports of other people's experiences. It would actually be quite surprising that the human being would not be tempted to do it. If the experience is psychologically possible, and it is a very special one, as meditation achievements presumably are, then it is to be expected that the meditator would try to find out a place for this experience in his philosophical understanding of life. Pointing out that Buddhist doctrines are not necessarily the result of meditation, let alone 'pure experience', is logical and salutary. Sharf is here right that much too often historians have been tempted to explain things only by appealing to spiritual experiences. Denying the possibility altogether is, however, unnecessary. Strictly speaking, it would require that Sharf should prove beyond doubt that meditative experiences cannot logically serve as a basis for philosophical inferences or that in each and every concrete historical case so far meditation and reflection upon it have never been the source of a doctrinal development.

A final word about meditation: my assumption that meditative experiences may have been a basis of philosophical inferences is not motivated by the desire to defend the 'pure experience' or the supremacy of the contemplative way of knowledge. I actually speak of inferences based upon meditation and not of 'pure experience' as a direct source of doctrinal development, something which I find quite unlikely. Obviously, this is not the place to embark upon a full discussion but I should like to make a very brief comment. I do not think that the 'otherness' of an experience, i.e. its being of a different psychological quality, ensures its absolute truth-value. The only way we can decide our epistemic criteria is not by appeal to private experiences as the ultimate source of truth. The truth of a philosophically relevant proposition can only be proved by those common experiences which have, to use a Peircian

term, 'ultimate warranted assertibility'.

Let us now return to the beginnings of the Great Vehicle. As Harrison (1995, 66) points out, if we suppose that 'a substantial proportion of early Mahāyānists were forest-dwellers meditating monks', we could explain why early inscriptions contain almost no references to the Great Vehicle. It is significant that, as outlined above, the earliest epigraphical references to the Great Vehicle make their appearance from the 5th/6th centuries on and in the beginning they are mostly found on the 'cultural fringe' of the Indian civilisation (Schopen 1996, 13-14). The ascetic-centrality hypothesis can also explain why so many early Mahāyāna sutras, like the *Rāṣṭrapālāparipṛcchā*, the *Kāśyapapārivarta*, the *Akṣobhyavyūha*, the *Ugraparipṛcchā*, the *Ratnarāśi*, the *Samādhirāja*, etc., stress the need to live in the forest and practise the *dhutaṅgas* (cf. Schopen 1996, 16-18). The *Rāṣṭrapālāparipṛcchā* and the *Samādhirāja* even use the old image of the solitary rhinoceros to recommend secluded spiritual cultivation. We can also understand why these early ascetic Mahāyānist communities, with little connection or, at least, with little control over the *stūpas*, were far less associated with their cult and exalted instead the worship, keeping, reading, copying, and spreading of their own scriptures. Many of the earliest Mahāyāna sutras, like, for instance, the *Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra* 般舟三昧經, the *Ajātaśatrukaukṛtyavinodanā-sūtra* 阿闍世王經, and the *Akṣobhyatathāgatasyavyūha-sūtra* 阿閼佛國經, are said to have talismanic powers which can protect from all types of disasters (Harrison 1993, 175-6).

The gradual rise of Mahāyāna from within the traditional *saṅgha* can explain the doctrinal continuities between the two movements. As we have seen in Section 2 of this paper, an impressive number of tenets and developments of the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature can only be understood if we refer to traditional Śrāvakayāna doctrines with which our authors seem to be perfectly familiar. The hypothesis of a gradual formation of the new movement can also better explain why in spite of its general tone of self-glorification the literature of the new movement contains many passages which strike a note of conciliation with the Śrāvakayāna ideals. The deep-rooted misconception concerning an unfailing, ubiquitous fierce criticism on the Lesser Vehicle by the new movement is not supported by our texts. It is true that such attacks do exist and that the *bodhisattva* ideal is universally presented as superior to all other religious aspirations, but the new agenda is not carried out at the expense of completely denying the old tradition. It has often been noted that the term *hīnayāna* does not occur so frequently in the earliest scriptures of the Great Vehicle (Harrison 1987, 80, speaking of the Chinese translations in the 2nd century CE; Shizutani 1974, 40-41, Saigusa 1981, 124-5, on the rarity of the term in the *Aṣṭa*⁸¹; cf. Conze 1978, 7, n. 1, which points out that *hīnayāna* is seldom used but terms like *hīnajātika*, *hīnaprajñā*, *hīnavīrya*, etc. are freely used). To be sure, the levels of the *arhats* and *pratyekabuddhas* are declared inferior compared to the attainments of a *bodhisattva*, but we find early Mahāyāna scriptures like the *Akṣobhyatathāgatasyavyūha-sūtra* 阿閼佛國經 which depict the *śrāvakas* as happily sharing Akṣobhya's Pure Land with the *bodhisattvas* (Harrison 1987, 83-4). Such examples of peaceful co-existence are not

singular and can be equally found in the *Aṣṭa*, the *Ajātaśatrukaukṛtyavinodanā-sūtra* 阿闍世王經, and the *Cheng ju guang ming ding yi jing* 成具光明定意經 (ibid., p. 84). With the passage of time, the conciliatory tone of some of these early Mahāyāna texts gradually gives way to a more vehement, but not always complete, condemnation of the Lesser Vehicle.^{8 2} According to Conze (1994, X VI), the increase of sectarianism is a main criterion for detecting the later accretions in the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature.

It is undoubtedly a conjectural scenario but I would imagine that a great part of the earliest Mahāyāna communities started as groups of ascetics motivated not only by a new understanding of the Path but also by a strong opposition to the well-established monastic institutions which often tended to neglect the spiritual quest altogether. We would have here a particular case in the long history of the duality between forest-dwelling ascetics (*ārañṇavāsī/vanavāsī*) and monks living in villages (*gāmaṇvāsī*) or towns (*nagaravāsī*). We actually know fairly well the evolution of this dichotomy in Southeast Asia and this has been brilliantly summarised by Tambiah (1984, 53-76). It seems that most of the ascetic movements which have repeatedly occurred throughout the history of the *saṅgha* in Sri Lanka, Burma, and Thailand paradigmatically started as a return to the pristine ideals of the early Buddhist Path: an intense practice of meditation accompanied by the strict observation of the Vinaya rules and, very often, of the *dhūtaṅgas*. Although the initial motivation of these groups did not presumably lie in gaining the patronage of the royal houses or masses, their rejection of the material wealth and their earnest spiritual quest, often associated, at least in popular imagination, with supernatural powers, have usually led to their immense popularity and frequent transformation into (paradoxically!) rich and well-established monastic communities. Another factor leading to their initially un hoped-for success was their neutral stance and distance from the political turmoil of their age, which made them suitable for the role of mediators and state-sponsored religious reformers. It is significant to note here the relations of these ascetic groups with their original communities as well as their gradual metamorphosis. Mendelson, also quoted by Tambiah (1984, 62), writes:

The forest monks, much like the hermits, did not necessarily cease to belong to a mother community which might be well of the village kind. Later in time, forest monks began to appear in forest communities, devoting themselves no longer to meditation alone but indulging also in cultural and educational activities, as did town and village monks; in short, they seem to have been treated in some places as separate sects.

To return now to our early Mahāyāna Buddhists, we could surmise that a similar situation could have taken place. The initial motivation of breaking away from the mother community, most likely a Mahāsāṅghika milieu, must have been both doctrinal and spiritual. Not only that the dissident ascetics must have felt themselves growingly different from the rest of the community in their philosophical outlook but they also were perhaps disillusioned with the materialism as well as the passion for social respectability and fame of the monastic

Establishment. There is a deep-seated tendency with a large number of modern students of Buddhism to associate monastic life, first and foremost, with the strict observance of disciplinary rules and intense meditation. Disappointing as it may be, the reality is often quite different from our ideals and hopes. Undoubtedly, there is a scarcity of materials concerning life in the Buddhist monasteries of ancient India. I do not mean here traditional ideals or modern projections filled with pro-Buddhist expectations. A patient and careful scholar can, however, dig them out of the discouragingly intricate *Vinaya* and epigraphical sources. The scholar in question is no other than Gregory Schopen to whom we owe one of the very few studies on the monastic life and daily activities on the basis of the data contained in the Tibetan translation of the *Mūlasarvāstivādin Kṣudrakavastu* (Schopen 1997a).

Although the text makes it clear that the basic occupations (*bya ba*, **karaṇiya*) of a monk are meditation (*bsam gtan*, **dhyāna*) and recitation (*gdon pa*, **paṭhanti*), these were far from being the only monastic duties, at least for large sections of the coenobites. For instance, sweeping the *vihāra*, both a cleaning activity and a ritual act, was as much part of the daily life as the more 'lofty' occupations, especially for the monks in charge of physical properties (*dge skos*, **upadhivārika*). Furthermore, many passages clearly show that the monks had to choose between specialising in meditation or recitation. In other words, 'a monk was expected to do one or the other but not both' (Schopen 1997a, 17). In the *Śāyanāsanuvastu*, meditation in the forest is presented as potentially dangerous and in order to ensure a safe area for the tranquil practice of spiritual cultivation a place (*vastu*) in a public area (*prakāśe sthāne*) of the monastery had to be secured. This, in turn created the need for a series of new monastic occupations with coenobites specialised in and presumably dedicating all or almost all of their time to supporting this activity. The *Vinaya* texts actually authorise a series of many other menial jobs or qualified occupations necessary for the maintenance of the *vihāra* and ensuring smooth 'public relations' with the lay supporters.^{8 3}

Certainly, these texts basically reflect the situation of the *Mūlasarvāstivādin* community, and a complete study must include all relevant data in the entire Buddhist literature. Passages hinting at the practical hardships a meditating monk may have actually faced are not, however, limited to *Mūlasarvāstivādin* sources. I should like to discuss here another example which comes from the meditation classic of the Theravādins, the *Visuddhimagga*. The monk whose morality (*sīla*) has already been purified should first approach a spiritual friend (*kalyāṇamitta*) in order to receive his meditation subject (*kammaṭṭana*). 'After that he should avoid a monastery unfavourable to the development of concentration and go to live in one that is favourable' (*Visuddhimagga*, p.72; Ñāṇamoli tr. 1991, 90-91). A monastery unfavourable (*ananurūpa vihāra*) for the development of concentration (*samādhībhāvanāya*) is later on defined as a place which has any of 'the eighteen faults' (*aṭṭhārasa dosā*). 'These are: largeness, newness, dilapidatedness, a nearby road, a pond, [edible] leaves, flowers, fruits, famousness, a nearby city, nearby timber trees, nearby arable fields, presence of incompatible persons, a nearby port of entry, nearness to the border countries, nearness to the frontier of a

kingdom, unsuitability, lack of good friends' (*Visuddhimagga*, p.96; Ñāṇamoli tr. 1991, 118). Each of these faults is then described in detail (*Visuddhimagga*, p.96-99; Ñāṇamoli tr. 1991, 118-121). Let us quote here only the fragment depicting the situation in the first faulty monastery:

Firstly, people with varying aims collect in a *large monastery*. They conflict with each other and so neglect the duties. The Enlightenment-tree terrace, etc., remain unswept, the water for drinking and washing is not set out. [...] Drinking water must be maintained. By not doing it he [i.e. the monk who wants to practise meditation] would commit a wrongdoing in the breach of a duty. But if he does it, he loses time. He arrives too late at the village and gets nothing because the alms giving is finished. Also, when he goes into retreat, he is distracted by loud noises of novices and young bhikkhus, and by acts of the Community [being carried out]. (*Visuddhimagga*, p.96-97; Ñāṇamoli tr. 1991, 118-119)

This and all the other faults clearly suggest that a decent, quite place to pursue one's spiritual cultivation, presumably *the* very *raison d'être* of the Buddhist Path, was not so easy to find within the Holy Community supposed to exist in order to facilitate and promote it. A large monastery (*mahāvihāra*) such as depicted by Buddhaghosa here was a far cry from the peaceful Shangri-La where the ascetic would find the quite and spiritually-friendly environment necessary for his practice. Not only that we see that many of the young brethren were noisy and the Community was busy with prosaic administrative businesses (how close indeed to our modern academic institutions!) but we are also told that the monks in the monastery gathered with...varying aims or intentions (*nānāchandā*), and they, furthermore, quarrelled with each other (*aññamaññaṃ paṭiviruddhatāya*). Our ascetic does not seem to be expected to maintain the water, which, if my interpretation is correct, means that the monks actively engaged in meditation were served by other groups of coenobites doing the more menial jobs. They were perhaps an elite which the *vihāra* was supposed to treat with special care but...reality must have often been disappointing. The monk in Buddhaghosa's scenario gets no special treatment and, moreover, being a conscientious brother does his duties and...ends up with little time left for meditation and an empty stomach.

A restless soul tired of the existential *duḥkha* joining the Holy Order with a genuine aspiration for Awakening must have found many of these monastic establishments spiritually disappointing. Neither the Mūlasarvāstivādin texts discussed above nor the *Visuddhimagga* are contemporary with the proto-Mahāyāna age^{8 4} but I assume that starting with the Aśokan period the growth of the institutional success of the Buddhist *saṅgha* may have paradoxically led to an increasing number of monastic establishments where meditation was hard to practise or confined to a minority. Actually, quite a few of the early Mahāyāna sutras direct their criticism not only against the inferior attainments and salvific abilities of the *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas* but also against the decadence of the monastic institutions no longer

fulfilling their spiritual goals. A full-fledged attack on the Śrāvakayāna appears to have been felt either doctrinally unnecessary or socially inadvisable. Some of the proto-Mahāyāna groups appear to have genuinely considered that a large number of the traditional goals and practices could still be given a limited recognition in their new religious agendas. Other ascetic fraternities may have had to play down their critical tone. After all, in the incipient stage, they wanted to or had to keep minimum links with their mother communities and for a while were considered and probably considered themselves, at least in terms of Vinaya lineage, part of them. Some communities, few perhaps, had the zealot courage to break away in a more dramatic way but, by and large, the rise of the New Vehicle, as so many other historical events, must have been a gradual process.

While a vehement doctrinal criticism may have been considered unnecessary or inadvisable, a fierce attack on the monastic Establishment for neglect of the basic spiritual duties and aspirations must have been easier, even when it was directed at the mother community. This why we see so many early Mahāyāna scriptures lashing out at the excesses of the coenobites with no concern for spiritual values.^{8 5} Suffice it here to quote three stanzas from the *Rāṣṭrapāla* which is one of the most representative sutras in this respect:

Perpetually intent on gain they are, dishonestly feigning devotion to
[religious] practice.

‘No one in our world can ever vie with me in morality and virtues!’,
they will say.

Indeed they do hate each other, always fond they are to mutually pick
out their faults;

With farming and with trade they occupy themselves . Far from them do the
[true] ascetics stay!^{8 6}

In future times these monks with no restraint, a far cry from morality
and virtues,

With their feud, dispute, and envy will bring the ruin to my Law!

(*adhyavasānaparāḥ sada lābhe te kuṣāṣāḥyaprayogaratāś ca|*
kaścid apīha samo mama nāsti vakṣyati śīlaguṇeṣu katham cit||
te ca parasparam eva ca dviṣṭā chidragaveṣaṇanīyaprayuktāḥ|
kṣīkarmavaṇijyaratāś ca śramaṇā^{8 7} hi sudūrata teṣām||
evam asaṁyata paścimakāle bhikṣava śīlaguṇeṣu sudūre|
te' ntara hāpayiṣyanti madharman^{8 8} bhaṇḍanavigrahaīrṣyavaśena||)

(*Rāṣṭrapāla*, p.17)

(常念利養不休息 諂曲詐現精進相 自謂持戒及苦行 一切無有如己者
惡口僞言喜鬭諍 常求人過不休息 彼恒遠離沙門行 營理田作及販賣
未來世中諸比丘 棄捨功德及戒行 以懷嫉妬鬭諍故 覆滅損壞我正法)

(Jñānagupta's 闍那崛多 translation, T11.460c12-17)

The bitter dissatisfaction of the author who speaks on behalf or in praise of the ascetics

(*śramaṇā*), contrasted here with monks (*bhikṣava*), is very clear. The passage does not attack the coenobites because of their selfish preoccupation with their own liberation, the main Mahāyāna issue against the Lesser Vehicle, but simply because of their complete abandonment of any religious ideals. It is true that this disillusionment could have been voiced by laymen who caught a glimpse of the presumable Nirvāṇa-seekers predominantly concerned with trade benefits and factional disputes (How contemporary it sounds!). I find it, nevertheless, more likely that this considerable degree of familiarity with the dealings and atmosphere of a monastic institution is a reflection of inside knowledge more likely to have been obtained by fellow- or former fellow-coenobites. These were rather scandalous disclosures of the 'saṅgha behind closed doors' coming from insiders or, at least, laymen with a special status like Ugra in the *Ugraparipṛcchā*, which will be discussed below.^{8 9}

The hard-liners who could not find a place where they could quietly meditate and whose calls of return to a pure life of spiritual dedication fell on deaf ears had the alternative of setting up a forest-dwelling community in which these ideals could be fulfilled. Add here a progressive doctrinal background and a taste for non-orthodox interpretation, occasioned by philosophical reflection on the true meanings of the Teaching and on meditative experiences, and you have the formula of the first Mahāyāna communities. Their followers could be oxymoronically portrayed as groups with fundamentalist ideals and innovative interpretations. Let us not forget here that both elements are necessary to make a proto-Mahāyāna follower. Stressing only the ascetic ideal does not take us too far. Despite the scarcity of meditation-friendly environments, the Śrāvakayāna Buddhists continued their tradition of spiritual cultivation. After all, not all groups of ascetics had to turn into Mahāyāna communities of forest-dwellers. The *Vinaya* materials and the *Visuddhimagga* passages discussed above point at the difficulty not at the impossibility of practising meditation. There are many clues which indicate us that spiritual cultivation continued to be practised within the Śrāvakayāna doctrinal framework. The large number of meditation manuals and treatises, mostly preserved in Chinese translations, bear witness to the interest of the Śrāvakayāna authors in this area (Deleau 1992; 1993).^{9 0} There is nothing to prove beyond doubt that all these scriptures were written by the ascetics themselves but some passages seem to indicate first-hand knowledge of the actual practice. We also know that the *yogācāras* formed a respected group within the Sarvāstivādin community and their views are often recorded in the *Mahāvibhāṣā* (Nishi 1939). Finally, monks practising meditation (*prāhaṇika*)^{9 1} appear recorded as donors in inscriptions of the Kūṣāṇa age (Schopen 1997b, 31, 36; Damsteegt 1978, 247). Though their Nikāya affiliation is not known, they appear to be Śrāvakayāna monks.

Many of the earliest Mahāyāna communities started perhaps as 'fundamentalist' groups rather than revolutionary and populist fraternities. I use inverted commas here because fundamentalism is never a return to a perfectly reconstructable pristine Teaching of a founder. It is usually a blend of more or less dim knowledge of the early doctrines with a great deal of interpretation and agendas meant to serve contemporary needs. The earliest Mahāyāna

Buddhists had the fundamentalist goal of returning to the very roots. Instead of being content with the *arhat* ideal, of which they actually heard so seldom, if ever, in the monastic Establishment, they decided to recreate the Founder's own spiritual experience, or, in other words, to become Buddhas themselves. The movement was not necessarily started as a democratic avenue for all laymen to achieve the supreme Awakening. Yet its logic implied more openness: it is no longer the formal membership to the Order that matters but the desire to practise sincerely. While most of the ascetics of the new movement remained renunciant monks associated with a mother community, their 'formal' status, especially when considered from the latter's official viewpoint, must have been somehow in a grey zone. The stress of the importance of the formal membership to a monastic institution would have been as inadvisable as the emphasis of a complete break with the Order. This is not to say that the openness to laymen and their needs was a mere a strategic move. Genuine feelings of sympathy and compassion towards these people and all living beings must have been at work here. After all, the 'Lesser Vehicle' is far from lacking a tradition in this respect. These genuine feelings were perhaps enhanced by the inside knowledge that the layman with his sincere belief in the merits of worshipping the *saṅgha* was actually cheated by corrupt *bhikṣus* who had betrayed the noble ideals. Last but not least, the sympathy and compassion must have been seen as an integral part of the ideal to become a Buddha. The picture of the founder himself, which many of the ascetics must have got through exalted biographies and *Jātakas*, was one of selfless dedication.

The universal salvation commitment is undeniably present in most of the earliest Mahāyāna scripture but I believe that it should not be unduly over-emphasised. The earliest strata of the *Ratnagūṇa* and the *Aṣṭa* contain passages proclaiming the salvific mission of the *bodhisattva*^{9 2} but this does not appear to be the most recurrent theme. What strikes one in these as well as other *Prajñāpāramitā* texts is the exalted exposition of the new cognitive mode which ensures the attainment of the supreme Awakening. It is called the perfection of wisdom (*prajñāpāramitā*), or the wisdom of the Sugatas (*sugatāna prajñā*)^{9 3}, or the omniscience (*sarvajñātā*, etc.)^{9 4}. The first two chapters of the *Ratnagūṇa* often repeat, almost like a refrain, the following sentence: 'this is the practice of the wisdom, supreme amongst perfections' (*eṣā sa prajñā-vara-pāramitāya caryā*) (Ch. 1, verses 12, 14, 23, 24, 26, 28; Ch. 2, verses 1, 12) (cf. Conze 1994, X). Even in the case of a sutra like the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, for which the One Vehicle salvation theme is central, the early history of the text appears to be characterised by a more marked emphasis on the wisdom aspect. As Karashima points out in his brilliant philologico-historical study (1993, especially 171-174), in contrast to the Nikāya tradition which makes a sharp distinction between the awakening of a *śrāvaka* (*śrāvakabodhi*), a *pratyekabuddha* (*pratyekabodhi*), and the Buddha (*anuttarā samyaksaṃbodhi*), the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* strongly urges everybody to attain the wisdom of a Buddha. The importance of the wisdom in the sutra is also apparent from the fact that in its earliest version the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* was an eulogy of the Great Wisdom (*mahājñāna*) rather than of the

Great Vehicle (*mahāyāna*). The following fragment sums up one of Karashima's most important conclusions in this study:

[...] in the idiom used by the old SP [= *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*], both *jñāna* and *yāna* had the same form *jāṇa* (*jāna*). It was the parable of 'the house in flames and the three carts' 火宅三車 in the *Aupamyā* Chapter which added to the sutra the amusing flavour of a narrative based upon a word play making use of this situation. But this word play resulted in confusion. In the idiom of the old SP, *jāṇa* (*jāna*) had both the meaning of 'vehicle' and 'wisdom' but it appears that only the *Aupamyā* used the term with its meaning of 'vehicle', while the other chapters probably used it in the sense of 'wisdom'.

[...] However, with the passage of time, the original idea was forgotten and under the influence of the *Aupamyā* Chapter, even places in which the word should have been construed as 'wisdom', it started to be interpreted as 'vehicle'. [...] This led to the wrong Sanskritisation of *jāṇa* (*jāna*), originally meaning 'wisdom', as *yāna* ('vehicle'). (Karashima 1993, 173)

This great emphasis on wisdom must have been in line with the fundamentalist agenda of the early Mahāyānists. Becoming a Buddha oneself means the transcendence of all attachments whatsoever, and the corollary of this new ideal is that the adept must forsake the attachment to this ideal itself.⁹⁵ The early *arhat* ideal is not so different from this but what gives Mahāyāna its distinctive flavour is pushing the non-attachment, emotional and cognitive, to its utmost logical consequences. Nirvāṇa must be sought without being sought, practice must be done without being practised. A discursive mode of thinking can no longer serve the basic purpose of attainment without attainment. It is here that meditative states, super-normal powers, and Buddha's inspiration come to play a crucial role. I am not the first one to point out that there is an unmistakable vein of mysticism running through the *Prajñāpāramitā* and Mādhyamika literature (cf. Vetter 1984; Conze 1978, 6; May 1959, 20; de Jong 1949, X II). The combination of discursive reflection and mystical realisation represents the very core of the *Prajñāpāramitā* philosophy, and much of its development can certainly be interpreted as a process of inner evolution. There is, nonetheless, another aspect, linked to the historical realities of the age, which must have proved enormously beneficial for the exponents of the early Great Vehicle movement. The stress on mystical and supernatural attainments, usually connected with meditation and ascetic practices, was also a guarantee of freedom, at least doctrinal freedom, from the monastic Establishment which may have had claim of control of the scholastic and ordination orthodoxy but had no strong means of suppressing declarations of direct inspirational creativity.⁹⁶ As Harrison (1995, 66) aptly remarks,

There followers of the Mahāyāna had to lay claim to be in a sense the true inheritors of Gautama, the inheritors of his mantle, and they had to establish that claim both with other Buddhists and with the population at large. There were, as far as I can see, two possible ways of doing this: by the possession of relics, and by the

(perceived) possession of ascetic techniques and magical powers.

Most of the *samādhis* in Mahāyāna Buddhism are declared to be inaccessible to *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas*.⁹⁷ The adept who mastered them could claim that he shared a spiritual experience similar to that of the Buddha and this entitled him to say that he was speaking by the Buddha's might.⁹⁸ This is clearly illustrated in a large number of Mahāyāna sutras and emphasising this aspect appears to have been a major concern for the earliest authors. The introductory part of Chapter 1 of the *Aṣṭa*, for instance, wants to make it clear from the very beginning that whatever Subhūti will say it will be said by Buddha's might or authority (*buddhānubhāvena*, *Aṣṭa(M)*, p.4, *Aṣṭa(W)*, pp.28-30; Lokakṣema's translation: 持佛威神, T8.425c).⁹⁹

Like the in the case of the forest-dwelling monks of Southeast Asia, the pure way of life of the proto-Mahāyāna communities as well as the emerging ideal of the spiritually accomplished and compassionate *bodhisattva* must have led to a definite interest and respect amongst lay people. Nothing of this survives in inscriptions or documents but one thing is sure: these early Mahāyāna groups could not have survived without a certain degree of lay support. It is impossible to give even a very rough estimation of the scale of the new movement. Again, only a general statement can be made. The assumption of a high number of proto-Mahāyāna groups and followers would automatically imply a greater social presence, and this is not supported by archaeological and epigraphical evidence. If, on the other hand, we surmise that their number was very low, we could not explain the impressive textual output which undoubtedly continued throughout this period of inscriptional silence. Even if the scale of the new movement was small or relatively small, its existence could hardly have escaped totally unnoticed to the mainstream monastic community. Yet, the scarcity of direct references and attacks against Mahāyāna in Śrāvakayāna sources is surprising. I would conjecture here that the next step in the history of Mahāyāna was its tacit acceptance (not in a doctrinal sense but social) by large segments of the Śrāvakayāna Order and the beginning of a new phase of peaceful co-existence. The more tolerant monasteries accepted co-existence with such groups, which, as I have suggested above, must have often kept some relations with a mother community. This situation lasted for centuries and this explains why the Chinese travellers speak so often of mixed monastic communities. Even when 're-included' into the mainstream monasticism, the Mahāyānikas appear to have remained or kept geographically and institutionally peripheral for the next few centuries.

What were the merits of this symbiosis? Maybe some Śrāvakayānika communities, despite the shortcomings of their institutions, were genuinely tolerant and found a place for these ascetics with which they often shared a common Vinaya lineage. Maybe the orthodox coenobites and scholastics wanted to keep the new potential trouble-makers under control, and it was better to have them under their eyes than far in the forest. For the Mahāyānikas, the benefits could have been multiple. Their economic survival was on a more certain basis. If cautious not to create a disruption of the monastic institution itself, they could recruit new

converts from amongst their fellow-monks or laymen. They could also diversify their activities and form new specialised subgroups, as the keepers of the *Bodhisattva-piṭaka* or the followers of the Bodhisattva Way (preachers?) in the passage below.

A glimpse into this new phase of co-existence as well as into the role of the 'layman' in the Great Vehicle is offered by the *Gṛhapatyugraparipṛcchā-sūtra*, one of the earliest scriptures to be translated into Chinese.¹⁰⁰ The sutra revolves round the question of the householder Ugra 甚理家¹⁰¹ concerning the way renunciant *bodhisattvas* 開士去家爲道者 and lay *bodhisattvas* 開士居家爲道者¹⁰² should practise the Path (T12.15c; T.12.23b; P23.Shi297b-298b).¹⁰³ After preaching the importance of the three refuges, morality, and converting 教化 the sentient beings, Bhagavat's 衆祐¹⁰⁴ answer takes an unexpected turn for one accustomed to the Vimalakīrti-type of Mahāyāna sutras. The Lord exposes the evils of the householder's life, compared with the sea never satiated to swallow rivers, an excellent food mixed with poison, etc. (T12.17c; T12.25b; P23.Shi305a). He utters a long eulogy on the virtues of becoming a monk (T12.19a; T.27.a; P23.Shi313b-317a), the ten ascetic practices (*dhūtaguṇa*) (T12.20a; T12.28a; P23.Shi321b), and dwelling in the forest (T12.20a-21c; T12.28a-29c; P23.Shi323a-328a).¹⁰⁵ The sutra contains here interesting details about what I assume to be the symbiotic phase of a Śrāvakayāna-Mahāyāna community. Ugra is told that he must strive to learn and practise under the following categories of monks (T12.19a28-b3; T12.27a21-25; P23.Shi317b5-8): the erudite 多聞 (**bahuśruta*)¹⁰⁶, the one versed in the sutras 明經者¹⁰⁷, the one observing *vinaya* 奉律者¹⁰⁸, the one keeping the [*Vinaya*] matrices 奉使者 (?)¹⁰⁹, the one keeping the *Bodhisattva-piṭaka* 開士奉藏者¹¹⁰, the one [dwelling in] mountains and marshes 山澤者 (**āraṇyaka*)¹¹¹, the one practising the acceptance of [any kind of?] offerings 行受供者 (**paiṇḍa-pātika*)¹¹², the one practising meditation 思惟者¹¹³, the one practising the Path (*yoga*?) 道行者¹¹⁴, the one of the Bodhisattva Way 開士道者 (**bodhisattvayāna*)¹¹⁵, the one helping [with the menial affairs of the monastery] 佐助者¹¹⁶, and the supervisor [of the monastery]¹¹⁷ 主事者 (T12.19a-b; T12.27a-b; P23.Shi317a-318b).¹¹⁸ These categories are not portrayed as antagonist groups of lay followers or ascetics, on the one hand, and traditional Mainstream monastics, on the other, but rather a symbiotic gathering of monks with apparently different doctrinal convictions and religious preoccupations.

Although Ugra is instructed in the first part of the sutra on specifically lay practices, near the end of the text the Lord exhorts him to lead a life according to the renunciant's precepts 受去家之戒¹¹⁹ (T12.22.a; T12.30b; P23.Shi330b-331a).¹²⁰ It is true that Ānanda is told by the Buddha that Ugra's virtue¹²¹ cannot be matched even by a thousand *pravrajita bodhisattvas* (T12.22b; T12.30c; P23.Shi322a), but our main character has already attained an extraordinarily high spiritual level. This is far from an assertion that lay people, as we commonly understand the term, can attain the supreme Awakening as such. In this case the lay status is purely formal and is maintained only for the sake of liberating sentient beings in more effective way. Lay *bodhisattvas* like Ugra must undergo a thorough training according a full-

fledged ascetic cultivation programme wrapped in a skilful Mahāyāna package. In such contexts, the term ‘lay bodhisattva’ becomes volatile.^{1 2 2} In terms of spiritual cultivation, we can hardly call Ugra a lay follower. He is an ascetic in disguise.^{1 2 3} It would seem that even if we accept a full or limited role of the lay followers in the rise of Mahāyāna, the overwhelming importance of their ascetic training cannot be denied. This background should, in turn, be explained and investigated as the real key to the origins of the Great Vehicle movement. And this is what this modest contribution has tried to do in a preliminary way.

ENDNOTES

¹ The word ‘preliminary’ qualifying anything which has to do with scientific research is more or less a pleonasm. Strictly speaking, any scientific study is by necessity preliminary as future discoveries and rethinking of the matter will potentially require its revision or discard. I use the word here in its weak sense to stress the very high degree of ‘preliminariness’ of my study. Not only that far more data are necessary to cover the complex problems concerning meditation and the beginnings of Mahāyāna but also a great deal of philological work is needed to solve many difficult issues which underlie all texts. I often had to sacrifice the latter in favour of a bird’s eye view of the topic.

² The phrase ‘den dogmatischen Schlummer unterbrach’ comes from the *Prologomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik, die als Wissenschaft wird auftreten können* (*Prologomena to any Future Metaphysics*) (Kant 1911, 260), originally published in 1783 as Kant’s response to the criticism received by his first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. I must immediately add that in using Kant’s famous words, which acknowledge his indebtedness to David Hume, I have no pretension whatsoever that I deserve to be compared with the great German philosopher. Any expectation of a ‘Copernican Revolution’ is, therefore, inadvisable.

³ Needless to say that Hirakawa’s theory is not singular. Suffice it to mention here Lamotte’s classical article (1954), whose main thesis is repeated in Lamotte 1984.

⁴ Williams (1989, 22) also quotes this fragment. He then adds, ‘It seems unlikely to me that the Mahāyāna was the result of organized and influential activity by lay people.’

⁵ Schopen is not mainly concerned here with the periodisation of the Great Vehicle as such. He refers to the period from the beginning of the Common Era to the 5th/6th centuries as the Middle Period of Indian Buddhism (Schopen 1996, 1), and this largely coincides with my dates for early Mahāyāna. I take this opportunity to thank very much Professor Schopen for allowing to quote from and refer to the handouts of his lectures (Schopen 1996; 1997a). His findings have not been published in English yet but I understand that, fortunately, a Japanese translation of these lectures will soon be released.

⁶ There are extremely rare cases of references to Mahāyāna before the 5th/6th centuries in documents other than Mahāyāna scriptures themselves. A 3rd century document from Niya, in the Serindian cultural zone, uses the phrase *mahāyāna-saṃprastita* (Schopen 1996, p. 44, n. 39). Then we find it ‘in a primitive form in an inscription recording the donation of a trader or merchant in the Northwest (Mathura-2nd/3rd Cent.)’ (ibid., p. 45, n. 39).

⁷ In a personal communication Paul Harrison also suggested me the 6th century as the upper limit of the early Mahāyāna period.

⁸ A careful collation of all Sanskrit versions, Tibetan and, more important in this case, Chinese translations is a must. Unfortunately, lack of time has prevented me from doing it with all passages, and this, admittedly, is a serious drawback of the present study.

⁹ Very few modern scholars have doubted the attribution of the translation to Lokakṣema. One example is Hayashiya (1948, 519-569) who considers that the translator of the *Dao xing boruo jing* was Dharmarakṣa 竺法護.

¹⁰ For a critical survey of the main hypotheses concerning the textual history of the *Aṣṭa*, see Schmithausen (1977, especially 35-40). The intricate situation of the many Chinese translations and the light they shed on the development of the sutra is discussed in Lancaster (1975, 30-41). The classical survey in Japanese of the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature remains Kajiyoshi's detailed study (1980). The *Aṣṭa* lineage is discussed mainly between pages 40 and 98. Needless to say that the main historical and philological data concerning the *Aṣṭa* can also be found in Conze 1978.

¹¹ For more details, see Yuyama 1976, XX XIXff. The Tibetan translation, especially the Dunhuang recension, appears to be very important for the textual history of the text (ibid. X VI—X VII; X X X ff.).

¹² Yuyama (1976, XIX) also cites Conze's hypothesis. He also notes that the language of the text is obviously old representing 'a fine example of Buddhist Sanskrit literature at its earliest stage' (Yuyama 1976, XX).

¹³ In Conze 1978, 9, the great scholar sounds much more cautious and states that 'it is very difficult to come to a decision on whether it is the *Ratnaguṇa* which is prior to the *Aṣṭa* or the other way round.

¹⁴ I am aware that the argument of simplicity alone does not necessarily yield the same conclusions in determining the earliest layers of a text. Speaking about the *Aṣṭa*, for instance, P. L. Vaidya conjectures in the Introduction to his edition of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* (*Buddhist Sanskrit Texts*. No. 4. Darbhanga: The Mithila Institute, 1960, p. X VI) that Dharmodgata's sermon in chapter 31 (especially paragraph 1 on page 259 of his edition) represents 'the oldest and simplest form' of the *Prajñāpāramitā* doctrine. Conze (1994, X VI), on the other hand, declares chapters 30 and 31 to be 'quite late' additions. Conze, and many other modern scholars who share a similar view, adduce, however, extra evidence from the history of the Chinese translations of the text to support the fact the above chapters represent a later accretion.

¹⁵ Kajiyoshi calls the *Aṣṭa* groups of versions and translations the '*Dao xing jing* 道行經 lineage' and the *Pañca* group the '*Fang guang jing* 放光經 lineage'. A detailed treatment of the latter is found in Kajiyoshi, 1980, 97-111. For a brief overview of Kajiyoshi's conclusions concerning the historical development of the whole *Prajñāpāramitā* corpus, see ibid., pp. 723-727. For a discussion of the textual history of the *Pañca*, see Lethcoe (1976). Though not mainly dedicated to an analysis of the *Pañca* recensions, Schopen (1977) contains not only pertinent remarks on Conze's translation of *The Large Sutra on Perfect Wisdom* but also a very useful survey of all relevant texts.

¹⁶ This is the most probable reconstruction of title which the treatise adopts when referring to itself. The

original title may have also been **Mahā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra-upadeśa*. On the title and its probable Sanskrit reconstructions, see Lamotte 1944-1976, vol.3, pp.V-VIII. The Japanese scholar Unrai Wogihara reconstructed it as the **Mahāprajñāpāramitā-upadeśa-sāstra* (quoted after Nakamura 1987, p.239, n.25).

¹⁷ Though Lamotte uses the word in singular, I think it is equally possible that we may have to deal here, as in the case of other encyclopaedic works, with a number of authors and redactors.

¹⁸ Any discussion concerning the author(s) of the *Prajñāpāramitopadeśa* should also take into account Kumārajīva's role. This is acknowledged by contemporary Chinese sources which tell us that the original Sanskrit text was much longer and Kumārajīva actually condensed the treatise. For all relevant details, see Lamotte 1944-1976, vol.3, pp.XLIV-L. Not all modern scholars have, however, viewed Kumārajīva's role in the translation/editing process of the text as an attempt to abridge the supposedly huge original. Hikata (1958), for instance, thinks that the basic text of the *Prajñāpāramitopadeśa* was written by Nāgārjuna himself but Kumārajīva played an active part in editing and enlarging many passages. Such a view remains, nevertheless, highly conjectural. On the other hand, though not exactly an enlarging the text, Kumārajīva and his jumbo-sized 'editorial board' of 500 scholars did add explanations of Indian terms to make the reading more palatable for the Chinese reader. This is clearly proven by Lamotte (1944-1976, vol.3, pp.XLIX-L) who also agrees that in this sense Hikata's distinction between passages authored by Kumārajīva and those attributable to 'Nāgārjuna' is quite justifiable (Lamotte refers here to Hikata's Introduction to his edition of the *Suvikrāntavikrāmin*). The great Belgian scholar sums up this process as: 'L'*Upadeśa* est l'œuvre d'un Indien, mais que ses traducteurs mirent à la sauce chinoise; et ce fut là la raison de son succès' (Lamotte 1944-1976, vol.3, pp.XLIX).

¹⁹ I should like to express my whole gratitude to Dr Zacchetti who kindly sent me a copy of his paper and allowed me to quote from it.

²⁰ It is very good news indeed that Dr Zacchetti intends to publish his excellent study soon. This will undoubtedly enable the readers to appreciate the soundness of his textual evidence and argumentation.

²¹ Zacchetti rightly sounds a cautious note, however, against any possible exaggeration of the importance of his findings: 'Besides these isolated instances of "anticipation pattern", no systematic influence of the DZDL on Sanskrit Larger *Prajñāpāramitās* can be found' (p.8).

²² In many instances, it is very hard, if not impossible, to decide what is directly related to spiritual cultivation. Technical passages on *dhyāna* or *samādhi* can certainly be identified but these are not the only methods of a *bodhisattva*'s training. Especially, the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature, with its relativist position, tends to argue that it is not so important what you practise but rather how you practise. Seen from this perspective, a text like the *Vajracchedikā*, which probably belongs to the early strata of the *Prajñāpāramitā* texts (Nakamura 1987, 160-1), contains virtually nothing on meditation. The way of looking into the (non-)reality of phenomena which it exposes is, however, the most important part of the *bodhisattava*'s spiritual cultivation.

²³ The exact translation of *apraṇihita(-samādhi)* raises difficult problems. The most frequent renderings are 'wishlessness' and 'desirelessness', the latter being also adopted in the first version of this paper. I am most grateful to Dr Lance S. Cousins who kindly pointed out to me that this is not the most appropriate

rendering and that the *Critical Pali Dictionary* equivalents of ‘aimless, not bent on anything...’ more aptly convey the original meaning of the term. I am also greatly indebted to Professor Schmithausen who kindly answered my question concerning the meaning of the term by referring me to his views expressed in the book review on the *Sanskrit-Wörterbuch der buddhistischen Texte aus den Turfan-Funden* (Schmithausen 1987). Coupled with a careful (I hope) reading of some relevant passages, my rethinking of the matter has led me to believe that ‘directionless(ness)’ would better convey the lack of mental orientation which seems to characterise the state. I must, nevertheless, add that though the two eminent scholars mentioned above have been instrumental in reshaping my understanding of the concept, I am alone responsible for devising this translation. I am aware that ‘directionless(ness)’, whether appropriate or not, has the disadvantage of contributing to the proliferation of the abstruse Buddhist Hybrid English vocabulary.

Now, although I think that this translation is philologically more appropriate, ‘wishlessness’ and ‘desirelessness’ are not completely incorrect provided that they are properly construed. Not directing one’s mind towards objectives or objects of existence may be said to mean not to desire or wish for them. The Indian sources I have consulted actually seem to imply both nuances, i.e. not directing one’s mind towards any *dharma*s is at the same time not desiring them. It must, nevertheless, be stressed that in those texts which have survived only in Chinese translation the way *apraṇihita-samādhi* is explained may be influenced by the rendering adopted by the translator(s). ‘Wishlessness’ and ‘desirelessness’ are, however, full of other connotations both in their everyday usage as well as in modern Buddhist studies. I have opted for ‘directionless(ness)’ which though less frequent and perhaps clumsy, better reflects the lack of mental orientation.

Let us first see what the sources have to tell us:

The *Kośa* (p.450, 1.1) uses in connection with *apraṇihita-samādhi* the phrase *tad atikramābhikhatvāt* or ‘due to being directed towards the transcendence of these [i.e. *anitya*, *duḥkha*, *samudaya*, and *mārga*]’ (Xuanzang’s translation: 能緣彼定得無願名。皆爲超過現所對故。T29.149c24-5). This refers to orienting one’s mind towards the transcendence of the Noble Truths of suffering, origination, and path, which are only preliminary means preparing the adept for the actual attainment of Nirvāṇa.

The *Mahāvibhāṣā* says, ‘The reason for calling the mental direction *apraṇihita-samādhi* is that the practitioners set their mind [in such a way] that they do not desire the *dharma*s of the three realms of existence.’ 期心故者、謂無願三摩地、諸修行者期心不願三有法故。(T27.538b17-8). (La Vallée Poussin 1980, vol. 5, p. 184, n. 1, reconstructs 期心 as **āśaya* and translates it as ‘intention’). The text continues: ‘Although in regard to the Holy Path there is no complete desirelessness, the [practitioner’s] mental direction does not wish for the three realms of existence.’ 雖於聖道非全不願、而彼期心不願三有。(T27.538b19).

The *Prajñāpāramitopadeśa* defines the term as ‘*apraṇihita* is knowing that there are no signs (*nimitta*) and thus there is nothing [towards] which an effort [should be made]. It is called the gate of effortlessness’ 無作者、既知無相、都無所作。是名無作門。(T25.206c16-17) (Lamotte 1944-1976, vol.3, p.1219, translates 作 as ‘réaction’ or ‘effort (*abhisamkāra*)’)

The Tibetan translation is usually *smon pa med pa* which literally means ‘absence of desires or wishes’. Chinese renderings basically vary between 無願 or ‘desirelessness’ (adopted, amongst others, by Xunazang) and 無作 or ‘effortlessness’ (used by Lokakṣema, Kumārajīva, etc.) (For a detailed list of Chinese translations of the three concentrations in *Prajñāpāramitā* texts, see Yamada 1959, 221).

Schmithausen (1987, 153-4) points out that the translation ‘unbegehrt, Unbegehrtsein’ or ‘not desired for, lack of desire’ adopted by the editors of the *Sanskrit-Wörterbuch der buddhistischen Texte aus den Turfan-Funden* (see Bechert 1976, p.105, s.v. *apraṇihita* 2) is not the most appropriate. Instead, Schmithausen shows that *apraṇihita* must be understood as ‘[seine Aufmerksamkeit bzw. Begierde] nicht auf...gerichtet habend oder richtend’ (p. 154) or ‘not having directed or directing [one’s attention or desire] towards’. Amongst many other sources, Schmithausen quotes from the *Vibhāṣāprabhāṣṭī* ad *Abhidharmadīpa* 583: *na praṇidhatte bhavam ity apraṇihitaḥ*, which he translates as ‘nicht [auf das Dasein etc.] gerichtet’ (p. 514) or ‘not directed towards [the existence, etc.]’.

Apart from the wide-spread use of ‘desirelessness’ or ‘wishlessness’, let us note here that Lamotte (1944-1976) translates 無作三昧 (Kumārajīva’s equivalent of *apraṇihita-samādhi*) as ‘concentration de la non-prise en consideration’, and Vetter (1984) renders the term *apraṇihita* as ‘free of goals’. In his *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit* (s.v. *apraṇihita*), Edgerton gives the translation of ‘(state that is) free from desire, longing, or purpose’. Rather uncommon and not exactly appropriate, Horner (1938, vol.1, p.161) translates *appraṇihito samādhi* as ‘concentration where there is no hankering’.

²⁴ In a study on the spiritual practices of the *Prajñāpāramitā* ascetic, Mano (1977) concludes that the content of the practices as such did not differ from the Lesser Vehicle. The difference lies in the *bodhisattva*’s altruistic commitment and active role in society. I can agree with this view only partially. It is true that the two Vehicles shared a common heritage of many practices but we should not forget the innovations, technical and theoretical, brought about by the Mahāyāna ascetics.

²⁵ See, for instance, *evam carantu vidu-panḍitu bodhisattvo nārhatva śikṣati na pratyaya-buddha-bhūmau/sarva-jñātām anusikṣati buddha-dharme śikṣā-a-śikṣa-naya śikṣati eṣa śikṣā* (Ratnagūṇa, p.19, verse 7).

²⁶ For an excellent discussion of the visualisation techniques, see Yamabe’s recent contribution (1999). Sueki (1986, 208-211) also discusses the historical significance of the visualisation sutras but I am afraid that I cannot agree with many of his conclusions.

²⁷ The Chinese translations contain a section which has no direct parallel in the Tibetan version and has a more categorical wording of the basic stance of the sutra: ‘Thought creates the Buddha, thought itself sees him. Thought is the Buddha....Since thinking is empty, then whatever is thought is ultimately non-existent’ (Harrison 1990, 43). 心作佛。心自見。心是佛。....設使念為空耳。設有念者了無所有。 (T13.906a1-2 and 6-7 respectively).

²⁸ The Taishō edition has: 一切字法不受字. I have emended it by deleting the last character 字. Not only that this 字 would make the meaning of the phrase difficult to understand but we also find a parallel sentence in the same chapter: 一切字法不受 (T8.426b1).

What the first 字 exactly stands for is not clear to me. Does it have its usual meaning of *kāra* or *akṣara*? Could it refer to *nimitta*? As explained above, Lokakṣema’s translation is not a word for word equivalent of

the extant Sanskrit text. The phrase here appears, however, to represent the rough equivalent of the *samādhi* name which we find in the Sanskrit edition: *sarvadharmānupādāno nāma samādhiḥ* (*Aṣṭa(W)*, p.60). The Chinese text does not indicate that this is a *samādhi* name but in the next sentence it says that the *samādhi* (apparently referring to this *samādhi*) is infinite, etc. Maybe Lokakṣema translated faithfully his own Sanskrit version which is different from the one we have today. Or maybe it is just a rather awkward rendering into Chinese which omitted *nāma samādhiḥ*.

²⁹ Haribhadra comments: ‘*sarva-dharmā nopādīyante yena samādhinā sa sarva-dharmānupādāno nāmo samādhiḥ*’ (Wogihara, p. 60).

³⁰ The Chinese has: 無有邊無有正. The Sanskrit has *sarvadharmānupādāno nāma samādhir bodhisattvasya mahāsattvasya vipulaḥ puraskṛtaḥ apramāṇa-nitayaḥ...* (*Aṣṭa(W)*, p.60). I take 無有正 to stand for *apramāṇa*, though this is far from being the standard Chinese translation of the term. The same phrase is also found at T8.426b1-2.

³¹ The Sanskrit text, which is the continuation of the above sentence, has: [*samādhir...*] *asādhāraṇaḥ sarva-śrāvaka-pratyekabuddhaiḥ* (*Aṣṭa(W)*, p.60).

³² The Sanskrit text has: *kṣipram anuttarāṁ samyaksambodhiṁ abhisambudhyate* (*Aṣṭa(W)*, p.60).

³³ The extant Sanskrit text contains no reference to the state of non-regression (see next note).

³⁴ The Sanskrit version for this second paragraph goes like this: *Buddhānubhāven’ āyusmān Subhūtiḥ sthāvira evam āha| vyākṛto ‘yam Bhagavan bodhisattvo mahāsattvaḥ pūrvakais tathāgatair arhadbhiḥ samyaksambuddhaiḥ anuttarāyāṁ samyaksambodhau| yo’ nena samādhinā viharati|| sa tam api samādhim na samanupaśyati| na ca tena samādhinā manyate| ahaṁ samāhitaḥ| ahaṁ samādhim samāpatsye| ahaṁ samādhim samāpadaye| ahaṁ samādhi-samāpannaḥ ity evaṁ tasya sarveṇa sarvaṁ sarvathā sarvaṁ na samvidyate||* (*Aṣṭa(W)*, pp. 60-1). Roughly speaking the philosophical message of both the Chinese and Sanskrit texts is the same. Differences of detail are, however, present, and this shows again that we have to deal here with two distinct redactions.

³⁵ For a detailed discussion of this *pāramitā* based on many Mahāyāna sources, most of which are not dealt with here, cf. Dayal 1970, 221-36.

³⁶ Hirakawa (1974, vol.1, p.354) makes this conjecture in connection with one of the earliest Mahāyāna scriptures, the **Ṣaṭ-pāramitā-sūtra* 六波羅蜜經 which is no longer extant.

³⁷ The equivalents *vitarka* and *vicāra* for 覺 and 觀 respectively are assured by the fact that the *Prajñāpāramitopadeśa* uses the same characters for these terms in the standard definition of the first *dhyāna* (cf. T25.186a5).

³⁸ The Chinese 滅定 undoubtedly refers to the attainment of cessation. Lamotte’s translation (1994, 44), based on the Tibetan version and Xuanzang’s 玄奘 Chinese translation, understands the term as referring to *nirodhasamāpatti*. The Tibetan ‘*gog pa*’ is not unproblematic. It usually stands for the Sanskrit *nirodha* but this does not necessarily mean that it refers to *nirodhasamāpatti*, whose full Tibetan translation is ‘*gog pa’i snyoms par ‘jug pa*. Thurman (1991, 24) translates here ‘without forsaking cessation’ and explains ‘cessation’ as ‘Skt. *nirodha*. The third Holy Truth, equivalent to *nirvāṇa*’ (p.115, n. 4). Bhikṣu Prāsādika reconstructs ‘*gog pa las kyang mi ldang* (*Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*, 404; see note 41 below) into Sanskrit as

nirodhān nottiṣṭhati (*Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*, p.86). Lal Mani Josh translates *nirodha* into Hindi as *nirodh ki avasthā* or ‘state of cessation’ (ibid., p. 216).

All the three Chinese translations make it clear, however, that we have to deal here with a meditative state. Kumārajīva and Xuanzang use 滅定 which is the standard translation of *nirodhasamāpatti*. Zhiqian 支謙 is not so clear but his wording also implies a trance state without mental activities, which most probably is the attainment of cessation (see note 39 below). Furthermore, the whole fragment deals with the correct way of practising meditation which makes *nirodhasamāpatti* sound very appropriate. The overall sense of the paragraph also appears to support reading *nirodhasamāpatti* here. All Buddhist laymen, after all, are supposed to perform ordinary deeds and not forsake Nirvāṇa, even though they are not usually able to attain it in this lifetime. So it would come as no surprise that Vimalakīrti is able of such a thing. On the other hand, being immersed in *nirodhasamāpatti* and yet displaying normal behaviour is indeed a great feat becoming the famous *bodhisattva* and fully agreeing with the other great deeds listed in this passage.

³⁹ Cf. Lamotte’s rendering (1994, 44): ‘Not withdrawing (*vyutthātum*) from the recollection of extinction (*nirodhasamāpatti*), but displaying ordinary attitudes (*īryāpathasamdarśana*), this is how to meditate’. Lamotte basically follows the Tibetan version and supplies in small format (like ‘recollection’ above) the variations and additions found in Xuanzang’s Chinese translation. The Chinese 威儀 as well as the Tibetan *spyod lam* very likely render here the Sanskrit *īryāpatha*.

⁴⁰ Kumārajīva’s (T14.539c21-22) and Xuanzang’s (T14.561b14-15) translations here are identical. The wording of Zhiqian’s 支謙 version, which is our earliest textual witness translated sometime between 223-253, is somehow different: 立於禪以滅意現諸身。是為宴坐。(T14.521c6-7) ‘Being in trance (**dhyāna*) and ceasing all thoughts [, and yet] displaying bodily [behaviour], this is the [correct] practice of meditation (**pratisamṛitina*)’. The basic meaning is, however, the same.

⁴¹ Bhikṣu Prāsādika’s edition of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* has ‘*jog pa*. I believe it is simply a typographical error for ‘*gog pa*, i.e. the usual Tibetan translation of *nirodha*.

⁴² Cf. Gunaratana 1985, 8-11.

⁴³ The *Aṣṭadaśasāhasrikā* uses the compound *samādhipāramitā* at least two times (vol.1, pp.94-5; vol.2, 19-21) in places where one would expect to see *dhyānapāramitā*. This may be another proof of the importance given to the word *samādhi* in the *Prajñāpāramitā* texts. Without other contexts, however, it is dangerous to draw conclusions as to whether we have to deal here with a mere synonym of the *dhyānapāramitā* or a deliberate lexical choice implying the superiority of *samādhi* over *dhyāna*.

⁴⁴ Haribhadra says nothing about their number and actual practice (cf. Wogihara 1933, p.97, ll.26-7).

⁴⁵ The Tibetan translation of the *Śata* apparently gives the number of 162 (Conze 1975, p.20, n.109). I have not been able to check the reference myself. The Sanskrit version edited by Ghoṣa gives first 115 *samādhis* (pp. 825-835, which list all *samādhis* with a short description) and then 121 *samādhis* (pp.1412-1414, which enumerate the *samādhis*, and pp. 1415-1426, which explain briefly each of them). We may have here a process of accretion within the same sutra. Anyway, a comparison with the 58 *samādhis* of the *Aṣṭa* suggests that the authors and redactors of the *Prajñāpāramitā* texts kept on increasing the number of *samādhis*.

⁴⁶ The sutra first lists 17 *samādhis* and then adds *peyālam yāvad Gaṅgānādivālikopema-samādhikoṭṭinayutaśatahasrapratilabdho*.

⁴⁷ A final conclusion is further precluded by the difficulty of accurately dating the *Mahāvibhāṣā*.

⁴⁸ Conze (1975, 21) aptly remarks, 'In the beginnings of the Mahayana it became usual to give names to a manifold variety of concentrated attentions on insights into aspects of truth, and even to the concomitants of being in a state of concentration.'

⁴⁹ I have adopted the translation given by Gómez et al. (Gómez and Silk 1989, 15-16). For a discussion on the philological problems raised by this term, see Gómez and Silk 1989, pp.79-80, n. 7.

⁵⁰ McRae (1998, 77) translates the term as 'unobstructed'. I consider Lamotte's (1965, 257) rendering of the phrase as 'sans résistance' more appropriate. The term *apratigha* appears frequently in *Prajñāpāramitā* texts with the meaning of 'non-resisting' (for references, see Conze 1967, 54).

⁵¹ The text also makes an interesting remark that this *samādhi* contains all *dhyānas*, *samāpattis*, *vimokṣas*, *samādhis*, *abhijñās*, and *śiddhis* (T15. 631c27-632a1; P32.289a3-a5). But this is again a generality which says nothing about this *samādhi* as a particular meditative technique. A similar remark is found in the *Pañca* (p.144, ll.8-9): *tatra katamaḥ sūraṅgamo nāma samādhīḥ. yena samādhinena sarva-samādhinām gocaram anubhavaty ayam ucyate sūraṅgamo nāma samādhīḥ*. 'What is the *samādhi* called 'the heroic march'? That *samādhi* by which the domain of all *samādhis* is encompassed is said to be the *samādhi* called "the heroic march"'.

⁵² *Prajñāpāramitopadeśa* (T25.207c-208a) declares the three concentrations to be actually identical and to have a unique object. This *samādhi* can assume different varieties according to the aspect examined and the type of person practising it.

⁵³ A brief but, as usual, extremely well documented note on the three *samādhis* is found in Lamotte (1944-1976, vol.3, pp.1213-5). In an excellent paper on mysticism in the early *Prajñāpāramitā* literature and Nāgārjuna, Vetter (1984, esp. 497-508) also discusses the three concentrations. For a study on the three *samādhis* in the Sarvāstivāda tradition, see Kawamura 1966. In his study mainly dedicated to *animitta*, Harvey (1986) also frequently refers to the *suññatā* and *appañihita* in Pali Buddhism.

⁵⁴ For canonical sources, cf. Vin III 92-3, DN III 219, SN IV 360, AN I 299, Mil 337. Vin III 92-3 uses three terms apparently referring to the same set of practices: *vimokkho'ti suññato vimokkho animitto vimokkho appaṇihito vimokkho. samādhīti suññato samādhī animitto samādhī appaṇihito samādhī. samāpattīti suññatā samāpattī animittā samāpattī appaṇihitā samāpattī*. The three gates to liberation in these canonical sources and its later Abhidharmic developments are construed according to the basic doctrinal framework of the Śrāvakayāna. Suffice it here to give only one example. The commentary to the *Vinaya* text cited above says that empty means empty of passion, hatred, and confusion (cf. Horner 1938, vol.1, p.161, n.3). Cf. also Vetter 1984, 500-1. The *Prajñāpāramitopadeśa* (T25.207b-c) contains a fairly detailed discussion on the particularities of the three concentrations in the Mahāyāna contrasted to the Śrāvakayāna understanding. The main characteristic is discussed in relation to the emptiness concentration and represents the well-known difference between the Śrāvakayānika *sattvasūnyatā* and the Mahāyānika *dharmasūnyatā*.

⁵⁵ Lamotte (1965, 22) also notes the close relation between the two Vehicles in respect with the three

concentrations: ‘trois Samādhi appelés Portes de la délivrance (*vimokṣamukha*) où le Petit Véhicule confine au Grand’.

⁵⁶ For other definitions, cf. *Pañca* p.222; *Aṣṭadaśa*, p. 47; *Prajñāpāramitopadeśa* (T25.206a-c).

⁵⁷ Akanuma (1929, 133) gives the *Sutta* no. 163 in the *Tikaṇipāṭa* (AN I 299) as the Pali equivalent of this Chinese translation. It is true that the Pali text also deals with the three concentrations, but unlike the Chinese text, and the corresponding Sanskrit *Prajñāpāramitā* fragments, which define the three *samādhis*, *Sutta* no.163 speaks about the three concentrations as the three methods (*ayo dhammā*) which can eradicate *rāga, dosa, moha*, etc. Unless we take similarity of topic as a very general criterion of correspondence, this Pali *Sutta* cannot be considered an equivalent of the Chinese and Sanskrit passage in question.

⁵⁸ Abhidharma Buddhism seems to have been aware of this danger. The *Kośa* (pp.449-51) speaks of three other *samādhis*, i.e. *śūnyatāśūnyatā-samādhi*, *aprañihitāprañihitā-samādhi*, and *ānimit्तānimitta-samādhi*, whose objects (*ālambana*) are *śūnyatā-samādhi*, *aprañihitā-samādhi*, and *ānimitta-samādhi* respectively (ibid., 450). Cf. also La Vallé Poussin 1980, vol.5, pp.184-192.

⁵⁹ Conze (1975, 62) translates slightly different: ‘a Bodhisattva, a great being who courses in perfect wisdom, does not join emptiness with emptiness, nor is emptiness a matter for joining’.

The Chinese version reads: ‘The *bodhisattva mahāsattva*, practising the perfection of wisdom (*prajñāpāramitā*), does not connect emptiness with emptiness. [...] Why? Emptiness, signlessness, and directionlessness are not something which can be connected or not connected.’ 菩薩摩訶薩行般若波羅蜜時、空不與空合。[...] 何以故？空、無相、無作、無有合與不合。(T8.223b6-9).

The additions in the square brackets in the main text belong to me. My understanding largely coincides with the *Prajñāpāramitopadeśa* (T25.328c16-24) which comments upon the passage as follows: ‘There are two types of emptiness. One is the emptiness concentration, and the other is the emptiness of phenomena (**dharmaśūnyatā*). The emptiness concentration is not something that can be connected with the emptiness of phenomena. Why? If one made efforts to become united with the emptiness of phenomena by means of the emptiness concentration [alternative rendering: ‘if one forcefully attempted to connect the emptiness concentration with the emptiness of phenomena’], then the own-nature (**svabhāva*) of phenomena would no longer be empty. Furthermore, what is empty has a nature which is empty by itself. It is not produced by causal conditions (**hetu-pratyaya*). If it were produced by causal conditions, it would not be called “empty of nature”. 空有二種。一者空三昧、二者法空。空三昧不與法空合。何以故？若以空三昧力合法空者、是法非自性空。又空者性自空。不從因緣生。若從因緣生、則不名性空。(T25.32817-21). I am indebted to Dr Stefano Zacchetti who kindly drew my attention to this commentary in the *Prajñāpāramitopadeśa*.

On the meanings of *yojayati* and *yujayati*, see Conze (1967). On the phrase *na yujyate* in the later Madhyamika philosophy, see May (1959, p.56, n.19c).

⁶⁰ Lamotte (1944-1976, vol.3, p.1214) considers that unlike the Theravāda Abhidhamma, the Sarvāstivāda scholastic tradition grants these three concentrations a significant place in the framework of the spiritual path. Dr Cousins personally informed me that the three concentrations have a very significant role in the Theravādin *Abhidharma*. I am not prepared to discuss the matter in detail here but I agree that we need to

rethink this view expressed by Lamotte.

⁶¹ I understand *yoga* here as ‘practice’. The Chinese translates here as 相應 or ‘correspondence’, ‘relation’, etc. Conze (1975, 65) renders it as ‘endeavour’ which is rather vague in this context. My understanding is that *yoga* replaces here the usual terms of *samādhi* or *vimokṣa*. The compound *prajñāpāramitā-yoga* occurs in the *Aṣṭa* (*Aṣṭa(M)*, p.344; *Aṣṭa(W)*, p.701).

⁶² The three concentrations are also called gates to liberation because their practice leads to *vimokṣa* and *nirupadhiśeṣanirvāṇa* (*Prajñāpāramitopadeśa*, T25.207a).

⁶³ On the same theme of practising the concentrations without abandoning the living beings and without actually attaining the Buddhahood, cf. *Aṣṭa*, p. 310; 356-7; 371; 375-79;

⁶⁴ The simile of the archer is also found in the *Ratnagūṇa* (Ch.20, stanzas 9-10, Yuyama ed. 1976, pp. 77-8). Cf. Vetter 1984, p.506, n.21.

⁶⁵ Conze (1994, 224) translates ‘facticiousness of the defilements and of Mara’. I think that Kajiyama’s and Tanji’s (1975, vol.2, 173) rendering of *kṛṣapākṣaṃ mārapākṣaṃ* as 煩惱に属するもの、魔に属するもの is more appropriate. Haribhadra does not explain the term as such but says: *Māra-pākṣaṃ cātikramyeti anen’ āntarāyika-dharma-samatikramaṇopāyaḥ sūcitah syāt* (Wogihara ed., p.754).

⁶⁶ Both Conze (1994, 224) and Kajiyama and Tanji (1975, vol.2, p.173) understand *samādhāv avatiṣṭhate* as referring to dwelling in the friendliness concentration. This is a distinct possibility but I think it makes more sense to understand the phrase as denoting the emptiness concentration (as well as the signlessness and directionlessness concentrations) which should be practised upon a friendliness basis. Haribhadra does not make any comments concerning this point.

⁶⁷ For a discussion of this passage, cf. also Vetter 1984, 506 and Schmithausen 1999, 16-18.

⁶⁸ I use for this passage Lamotte’s reconstruction (1994-76, 1220). Lamotte translates 狂慧 as ‘sagesses frénétiques’.

⁶⁹ Lamotte (1944-76, vol.3, p.1222) translates 營從 as ‘soldats (*sainika*)’. In note 1 on the same page he remarks that a similar comparison appears on page 135 (vol.1). The Chinese text in question (T25.72c2) has instead of 營從 the compound 侍從, translated by Lamotte as ‘suite (*parivāra*)’. I could not find the lexeme 營從 in any dictionary of Classical Chinese but both characters suggest the meaning of ‘attendants’ or ‘servants’, which is actually supported by the apparently equivalent usage of 侍從 in the above simile.

⁷⁰ This distribution is essentially the same with the *Mahāvibhāṣa* (T29.539b1-2) and the *Kośa* (Pradhan ed., 451) (cf. Lamotte 1944-1976, p.1224, n.3). This suggests again the familiarity of the author with the Sarvāstivāda tradition.

⁷¹ Cf. verse 24, Chapter 1 of the *Ratnagūṇa* (p.14-15) which gives us the classical definition of compassion in the Great Vehicle: the *bodhisattva* ‘produces [his] great compassion [but] has no notion of living beings’ (*mahatīm janeti karuṇām na ca sattva-saṃjñā*; Chinese translation: 發大慈悲為衆生、為已不起衆生相. T8.677b14-15).

⁷² I am grateful to Professor Schmithausen who kindly allowed me to quote from and refer to the handout of his excellent lecture.

⁷³ The problem is obviously related to the four *apramāṇas* and this has recently been the subject of an

excellent contribution by Maithrimurthi (1999). Maithrimurthi's detailed study follows their doctrinal history from the beginnings of Buddhism to the early Yogācāra.

⁷⁴ Faxian 法賢 appears to have read: *śikṣita-gaṃskṛtānām*. He translates: 若學般若住無爲、能攝一切波羅蜜。(T8.682c7).

⁷⁵ The *prajñā* mode appears, however, to be a cessation of verbal activities. The culmination of the *bodhisattva*'s career is described as *sarva-vāda-caryoccheda* or 'the stopping of all speech and practice' (Lamotte 1984, 93). This is, I believe, an intuitive state rather than a complete coming to a halt of all mental functions.

⁷⁶ Cousins (1984) deals with *samatha* and *vipassanā* in the Pali Canon. Kōchi (1973) uses a variety of sources from Chinese translations of Abhidharma texts and the *Yogācārabhūmi* to Zhihui 智顗 and the Chan tradition.

⁷⁷ I am much indebted to Schmithausen and Griffiths (1983) for the methodology of dealing with spiritual cultivation from a philologico-historical perspective. To the latter I also owe the terminological dichotomy of enstatic (a word actually coined by Mircea Eliade) and observational techniques.

⁷⁸ An aspect which could not be treated here is the triad *śīla*, *samādhi*, and *prajñā* which is a pan-Buddhist doctrine. A complete discussion of the relation between meditation and wisdom should, therefore, take into consideration this relationship, too.

⁷⁹ Though not referring to the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature in particular, La Vallée Poussin (1937, 190-191) seems to contrast *prajñā* with *śamatha*, *samādhi*, *dhyāna*, and *samāpatti*. We have seen, however, that the relation between all these practices is not so simple.

⁸⁰ Bareau believes that the original home of Mahāyāna should be sought in a region between Godaverī and the Ganges, i.e. Konakan, Mahākośalla, and Orissa (p. 300). This represents Bareau's version of the hypothesis which places the beginnings of the Great Vehicle in Southern India, a theory with a long history both in traditional and modern accounts. Related to this geographical placement, Bareau also gives some clarifications concerning his view on the main sectarian influences upon the early Mahāyāna communities. 'The Buddhist communities of this region must have received two currents of influences, one coming from the North, from Magadha, the sacred land of Buddhism, where all sects mixed together in their pilgrimages, and the other from the South, from the land of Andhra, where a group of sects lately issued from the Mahāsāṅghikas had settled and developed since before the Common Era' (p.301). I am not in a position to give any conclusive pros or cons against Bareau's geographical placement, but it is commonsensical say that this should be carefully checked against archaeological and epigraphical discoveries which have continued to pile up since 1955. It is worth mentioning that the earliest occurrences of the term 'Mahāyāna' in inscriptions mostly include peripheral places of the Indian civilisation: the mixed Serindian site at Niya, Mathura, Salt Range, Bengal, and Orissa (Schopen 1996, note 39, p. 45). Though not directly connected with the proto-Mahāyāna stage, these findings should, nevertheless, make us rethink (not necessarily reject) the theory of the Central Southern origin of the Great Vehicle. Bareau is actually aware of the fact that the earliest Chinese translations made by Parthian, Khotanese, and Sogdian monks in the 2nd century CE could represent a major shortcoming of a hypothesis which places the original homeland of Mahāyāna in

Dekkhan. His conjecture is far from being unrealistic. Maybe, he says, the number of the missionaries of the new movement was too small, and their passage through the predominantly Sarvāstivādin Northwest was too fast to be remembered and recorded. Or maybe they still called themselves monks of the Sarvāstivāda, or Mahāsāṅghika, or Vibhajyavāda schools, and the Mahāyāna sutras which they were carrying were still considered to form a part of the *Samyuktapiṭaka* or *Bodhisattvapiṭaka* of these schools (Bareau 1955, 300). Again, I can only say at this stage that the whole matter needs to be reconsidered in light of the newest discoveries in all fields related to Buddhist studies.

⁸¹ Shizutani actually says, 'The Chinese translations of the *Aṣṭa* (*Shōbon hannya* 小品般若) despise the two Vehicles but do not call them *hīnayāna* yet. The term *hīnayāna* is later and seems to appear first in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*' (1974, 40-41). Saigusa (1981, 124-125), referring to Vaidya's and Kajiyama's studies, points out that one occurrence of *hīnayāna* is, nevertheless, found in the Sanskrit Ms of the *Aṣṭa*, though he adds that he will not discuss the textual history of this passage. (Incidentally, it appears in Chapter 11 (*Aṣṭa*(M), p. 238, *Aṣṭa*(W), p. 50) which, as we remember, is not amongst the earliest.) He further gives data concerning the number of occurrences in the Kumārajīva's Chinese translation of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*: *mahāyāna* 60 times, *hīnayāna* 8 times, etc.

⁸² Generally speaking, the Mahāyāna attitude towards the Hīnayāna seems to have evolved into two main directions: (1) The *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, and later on the Tathāgatagarbha current, declare the Lesser Vehicle to be ineffective and proclaim the absolute supremacy of the One Vehicle (*ekayāna*), i.e. Mahāyāna. (2) Other trends, especially the Yogācāra, do not deny altogether the possibility of attaining Awakening by Śrāvakayāna spiritual cultivation but consider it an inferior form which the *bodhisattva* should not choose (Schmithausen 1999, 14).

⁸³ In the answers following his lecture at Otani University in 1997, Gregory Schopen referred to passages in the Sarvāstivāda *Vinaya* which go as far as to portray the meditation practice in a negative way. It seems that meditation in this text usually refers to the contemplation of the impure (*aśubhabhavanā*), which potentially could raise problems of respectability in a Brahmanic society so intensely preoccupied with polluting factors. Meditating monks are advised by the Buddha to build a meditation hall in order to avoid being accused of handling cadavers. Practising alone in the wilderness is presented as dangerous, and the monks are warned by the Lord that the forest is often haunted by *yakṣas* and *yakṣiṇis*.

⁸⁴ Buddhaghosa is actually concluding the passage discussed above with a quotation from the commentaries (*vuttam pi c'etaṃ Aṭṭhakathāsu*) (*Visuddhimagga*, p.99) which warn about these eighteen faults in verse form. Clearly, we have to deal here with a tradition which predates Buddhaghosa himself.

⁸⁵ Schopen (1997a, p. 16, n. 52) gives a long list of such critical passages in the *Rāṣṭrapāla*, the *Kāśyapaparivarta*, and the *Ratnarāśi*.

⁸⁶ Jñānagupta's 闍那崛多 translation suggests another understanding of this sentence: 'Far is he from the ascetic's practice!'.
⁸⁷ Finot has *śravaṇā* in the text but notes that the two Chinese versions give the equivalent of *śramaṇā* (p.17, n. 2). I have emended and translated it accordingly.

⁸⁸ Finot remarks that on the basis of the Chinese version this must be read *maddharmanī*. I have adopted

this reading here but I want to point out that we also have another possibility. T11.460c17 has 我正法 or 'my true Law' which could be a translation of *saddharmā*. In many varieties of the Northern Indic scripts *ma* and *sa* are very similar *akṣaras* which could be and actually were easily mistaken by the scribes. The Chinese 我 ('my') could be construed as an explanatory addition of the translator and/or *causa metri*, i.e. to keep the uniformity of the seven-character verse. T12.4b12 has 如來法 which does not appear to be a literal translation of a Sanskrit term here but a rough equivalent.

⁸⁹ Ugra is told that he should not talk to the people of the village about what happens in the *vihāra*, and vice versa (T12.19b5-8; T12.27a26-28; P23.Shi318a). The purport of this interdiction is not an attempt to conceal monastic corruption. This is actually the fragment which exhorts Ugra to study under various categories of monks depicted as exemplary models of behaviour (see below). The interdiction concerning the disclosure of the monastic life to village people was probably motivated by the desire to keep secret those spiritual activities which were considered beyond lay understanding. The urge to refrain from talking about the village in the monastery must have originated from the need to keep the life of the monks 'far from the madding crowd' with its worldly concerns. For Ugra's special status as a layman, see below.

⁹⁰ The group of texts known in Chinese sources as 'meditation scriptures' 禪經 include a number of texts of various affiliations ranging from purely Śrāvakayāna positions to hybrid creations and clear Mahāyāna doctrines and practices. The ascetics associated with these 'meditation scriptures' and their relationship to the rise of the Great Vehicle has been discussed by Odani (1996).

⁹¹ Edgerton translates *prāhāṇika* as 'engaging in (ascetic) exertion' and *prahāṇa* as 'exertion, strenuousness', the latter being discussed in a detailed entry. Lüders rendered the term as 'practiser of meditation' (see Schopen 1997b, 31, 36). Cf. also Damsteegt 1978, 247.

⁹² For the *bodhisattva*'s salvific dedication in the earliest layers of these works, see, for instance, the *Ratnagūṇa*, Ch. 1, verses 24, 25, pp. 14-15 and the *Aṣṭa(M)*, pp.20-21, 23-25.

⁹³ Cf. *Ratnagūṇa*, Ch. 1, verse 12, p. 11.

⁹⁴ Conze (1994, p.X X, n. 9) says that *sarva-ākāra-jñātā-caryā* or "knowledge of all modes" is a late scholastic term for the omniscience of the Buddha as distinct from that of other saints. The *Aṣṭa* always uses the simpler term "all-knowledge", except at X X X 507.' Lokakṣema's translation of the *Aṣṭa* use a phonetic transcription: 薩芸若. For a discussion of the development of the concept of omniscience in the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature, see also Kajiyoshi 1980, 635-351.

⁹⁵ Cf. Conze (1975, 5): 'All the main thousand lines of this Sutra [i.e. The Large Sutra on perfect Wisdom] can be summed up in two sentences: 1. One should become a Bodhisattva (a Buddha-to-be), i.e. someone content with nothing less than all-knowledge attained through the perfection of wisdom for the sake of all living beings. 2. There is no such a thing as a Bodhisattva, or all-knowledge, or a "being", or the perfection of wisdom, or an attainment.'

⁹⁶ We should not forget, however, the fourth offence involving defeat (*pārajika*) of the groundless claim of having attained the state of a the spiritually accomplished man (*uttarimanussadhammapālāpa*, *uttaramanuṣyadharmapralāpa*, 妄說得上人法). For the Pali *Vinaya*, see VinIII 87-109. For a detailed discussion of this defeat in the *Vinaya* literature, see Hirakawa 1993, 298-334. The case with our early

Mahāyāna authors must have been delicate. These people were not considering themselves authors in the modern sense of the word but only transmitters of the authentic Teaching. It is hard to say whether this could be regarded as a *pārajika* case.

⁹⁷ The appeal to abstruse *samādhis* as a way of proving the superiority of a teaching or Buddhist saint is not restricted to Mahāyāna texts alone. Migot (1956, 508-9) quotes a passage from the Chinese translation of the *Ekottarāgama* in order to show how appeal is made to such a *samādhi* in order to prove Śāriputra's superiority over Maudgalyāyana. I shall quote here only the most relevant part of the paragraph: 'But as to the *samādhi* entered upon by Śāriputra, Bhikṣu Maudgalyāyana does not know its name' 然舍利弗所入三昧、目連比丘不知名字。(T2.709b27-28). In another part of his classical study on Śāriputra, Migot (1956, 477) refers to a similar idea found in the *Asokāvadāna*. The fragment in question presents a hierarchy of levels of understanding: a *pratyekabuddha* has not even heard of the name of the *samādhi* comprehended by the Buddha's wisdom; similarly, the name of a *pratyekabuddha*'s *samādhi* is unheard of to Śāriputra, and so on, gradually decreasing, to Maudgalyāyana, Mahākāśyapa, Upagupta's *upādhyāya*, and Upagupta himself (T50.162b).

⁹⁸ Cf. Harrison 1993, 170-171.

⁹⁹ Such a view must have been greatly facilitated by the Buddhology shared by the Mahāyāna exponents as well as most of the Mahāsāṅghikas.

¹⁰⁰ The sutra was first translated into Chinese under the title of 'The Scripture on the Dharma-Mirror' 法鏡經 in 181 CE by the Parthian An Xuan 安玄 and the Chinese Yan Fotiao 嚴佛調. It was later translated by Dharmarakṣa 竺法護 as the *Yuqieluoyue wen pusa xingjing* 郁伽羅越問菩薩行經 at the end of the 3rd century or beginning of the 4th. It also forms Chapter 19 of the *Mahāratnakūṭa-sūtra* 大寶積經 (T11.472b-480b) translated by Saṅghavarman 康僧鎧 (3rd century?). The Tibetan translation '*Phags pa khyim bdag drug shul can gyis zhus pa zhes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo*' also represents Chapter 19 of the *Mahāratnakūṭa-sūtra* (P23.Shi296b-333b). The text has been translated into Japanese by Sakurabe (1974). For modern studies, cf. Sakurabe (1974, 346-350) and Hirakawa (1990, vol.2, 108-187). My references to the various passages first give the pages of An Xuan's and Yan Fotiao's translation, then Dharmarakṣa's translation, and finally the Peking edition of the Tibetan version. Lack of time has unfortunately prevented me from collating all these passages with Saṅghavarman's translation.

¹⁰¹ I give only An Xuan's and Yan Fotiao's Chinese equivalents in the main text and write the variants in my notes. Dharmarakṣa has a phonetic transcription for Ugra: 郁伽長者. The Tibetan rendering of Ugra's name is *Khyim bdag drag shul can*.

¹⁰² 爲道者, literally 'a person practising the Way', can be traced back to the *Lao zi* 老子 and the *Zhong yong* or *The Doctrine of the Mean* 中庸. In Chapter 48 of the *Lao zi* (Zhu ed., p. 192) we find the following passage: 爲學日益、爲道日損。'In the pursuit of Learning (*xue*) one grows day by day. In the pursuit of the Way (*dao*) one decreases day by day.' The modern editions usually have the above wording but a number of old editions and commentators insert 者 after 爲學 and 爲道, which would mean that we would have to read as 'the person who pursues...' (cf. *Lao zi*, Zhu ed., p. 192, notes). The Ma Wang Dui Ms, the earliest version of the text, has: 爲學者日益、聞道者日云(損)。'He who pursues Learning grows day by day. He

who hears the Way decreases day by day.’ (Lau ed., p. 204).

In Chapter 13 of *The Doctrine of the Mean* we read: 子曰、道不遠人。人之爲道而遠人、不可以爲道。 ‘Confucius said, “The Way is not something remote from man. If a man pursues the Way and yet departs from man [i.e. humanity], then this cannot be regarded as the [true] Way.”’) (*Zhong yong*, p. 226).

Yan Fotiao, who is also known to have studied and co-operated with An Shigao, probably had his basic training in Chinese classics and must have been familiar with such texts. As many of his fellow Chinese literati interested in Buddhism, he probably also felt attracted to Taoist works.

¹⁰³ Dharmarakṣa’s translates 出家菩薩 and 居家菩薩 respectively.

¹⁰⁴ Dharmarakṣa uses the same 衆祐 for *bhagavat* which was widely used throughout the so-called archaic translation 古譯 period covering all Buddhist texts rendered into Chinese before Kumārajīva.

¹⁰⁵ The praise of forest-dwelling is by no means restricted to our sutra. We find it in quite a few early Mahāyāna texts. The *Śikṣā samuccaya* dedicated a whole chapter to it (Bendall 1897, 193-201), which incidentally begins with a reference to the *Ugraparipṛcchā*. Dayal (1970, 222-3), quoting a large number of Sanskrit sources, refutes Anesaki’s view that the Mahāyāna writers ‘find the life of nobles or householders in no way incompatible with the practice of the *pāramitās* and the attainment of *bodhi*.’

¹⁰⁶ Tibetan translation: *dge slong mang du thos pa*.

¹⁰⁷ Tibetan translation: *dge slong chos rjod pa* or ‘Dharma-reciting monk’.

¹⁰⁸ Tibetan translation: *dge slong ‘dul ba ‘dzin pa* or ‘the discipline-keeping monk (**vinaya-dhara-bhikṣu*’). The division between monks specialised in sutras (*sūtrāntika*) and those experts in *vinaya* (*vinayadhara*) is very old being already found at the sites of Bhārhut and Sāñcī (cf. Schopen 1997, 26).

¹⁰⁹ The exact category meant here is not very clear. What the exact sense of the Chinese 奉使者 is remains a mystery for me. I have translated it following the Tibetan version *dge slong ma mo ‘dzin pa*, which unfortunately is not very clear either. I take *ma mo* to stand here for *mātṛkā* but it is again difficult to decide precisely what this means. It could refer to Abhidharma or proto-Abhidharma texts but it is more likely that it refers to Vinaya commentaries (cf., for instance, **Vinayamātṛkā* 毘尼母經 T24.801ff.). Sakurabe (1974, p. 278) translates it as ‘the *bhikṣu* who keeps the Vinaya summaries’ 戒律の綱要を保持する比丘. Actually in the following passage explaining what Ugra has to learn from each of these categories of monks, this *bhikṣu* is presented as a model from which the householder must study ‘how to restrain his mental, verbal, and bodily acts’ (P23.318a). Dharmarakṣa translates it as 住法者 or ‘the one dwelling in Dharma’, which again is not clear and does not seem to be the equivalent of the Tibetan term. Neither his text nor An Xuan’s and Yan Fotiao’s version includes 住法者 or 奉使者 in the passages explaining what Ugra has to learn from these categories of monks (T12.27b; T12.19b). If 奉使者 was really the original term used by An Xuan and Yan Fotiao in their translation, it is hard to decide what it actually meant. I think it is more likely that the text is corrupt and 使 should be emended to 律, but then we must either surmise an instance of dittography or venture to operate a more daring addition to the text, e.g. 奉律母者 (?).

¹¹⁰ Tibetan translation: *dge slong byang chub sems dpa’i sde snod ‘dzin pa*.

¹¹¹ Tibetan translation: *dge slong dgon pa pa*.

¹¹² Tibetan translation: *bsod snyoms pa*. The Tibetan version lists here four other categories not present in An Xuan's and Yan Fotiao's translation: *phyag dar khrod pa* or 'the one wearing only rags', '*dod pa chung pa* or 'the one with few desires', *chog shes pa* or 'the one easily content', and *rab tu dben pa* or 'the one living in complete solitude'.

¹¹³ Tibetan translation: *dge slong rnal 'byor spyod pa* (**yogācāra*; **yogin*).

¹¹⁴ Tibetan translation: *dge slong bsam gtan pa* (**dhyāyin-bhikṣu* or **dhyāṭṛ*). The Chinese terms used here lend themselves to several reconstructions and it is hard to decide precisely what Indian words they translate. The Chinese text, however, appears to list first **dhyāṭṛ* and then **yogin*. Dharmarakṣa has only 坐禪者 which could stand for both **dhyāṭṛ* and **yogin*.

¹¹⁵ Tibetan translation: *dge slong byang chub sems dpa'i theg pa*. Interesting to note that the lay follower is expected to learn under the monk of the Bodhisattvayāna the four means of conversion (*catvāri saṃgraha-vastūni*) (P23.Shi318b). This was appears to be a *bodhisattva*'s minimum requirement of altruistic involvement, and it was inherited from the Śrāvakayāna tradition. The *catvāri saṃgha-vatthūni* are well known in the Pali Canon (DIII 152; AN II 32; etc.). Together with the first two of the *brahma-vihāras*, they could be the ethical 'missing link' between the two Vehicles. It takes only few steps to amplify them into full-fledged altruism and universal salvation.

¹¹⁶ Tibetan translation: *dge slong lag gi bla*, which is translated by Das as 'one who does the menial service to the congregation of lamas in a monastery' (s.v. *lag gi bla*).

¹¹⁷ Tibetan translation: *zhal ta byed pa*. Das translates this word as 'to serve, to inspect, review, superintend', etc. (s.v. *zhal ta byed pa*).

¹¹⁸ Dharmarakṣa lists more categories than An Xuan's and Yan Fotiao's version: 多智者、解法者、持律者、住法者、持菩薩品者、閑居行者、分衛者、服五衲衣者、獨行者、坐禪者、大乘者、精進者、典寺者、觀一切比丘僧行。

¹¹⁹ T12.22a27 has 誡. I follow here the Ming edition which gives 戒.

¹²⁰ Dharmarakṣa's translation shows clearly that, at least in his version, we have here the equivalent of the full-ordination disciplinary rules (學具足出家戒法, T12.30b6). All translations actually list five principles supposed to be the equivalent of a monk's disciplinary rules. These principles are all very strict. For instance, they are very emphatic about celibacy, which should be perfectly observed even on the mental level (心不念習姪欲, T12. 30b9-10).

¹²¹ Dharmarakṣa translates 'the wisdom of their virtue' 其德之智 (T12.30c6).

¹²² The term 'lay' in the Buddhist context has different co-notations from the Christian institutions. As Harrison has pointed out, 'the terms *upāsaka* and *upāsikā* do not mean "layman" and "laywoman" in the usual English sense, but refer rather to persons hovering just below ordained status, those who are, as it were, semi-ordained.' (1995, 59). For the misconceptions governing the way the terms clergy and laity are usually construed, see also Durt 1991.

The social status of lay characters like Ugra, Vimalakīrti, etc. is not without relevance. They are very wealthy and well-educated. To speak in Western terms, they are members of the gentry. The term has often been used to speak of the Chinese literati class but I think we can also use it, *mutatis mutandis*, for most of

the wealthy Indian householders. The *New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* defines 'gentry' as 'people of gentle birth or good breeding; the class composed of such people, *spec.* that below nobility'. It would be interesting to collect all available data and come up with an accurate statistical picture of the social groups to which the householders in Buddhist texts belong, but even when they are *vaiśyas*, therefore below the *brāhmaṇa* and *kṣatriya* castes, they still form part of the 'twice born' (*dvi-ja*) community. Their wealth must have further contributed to their 'good breeding'. Most of the characters in our texts appears to enjoy the privilege of enough time and leisure to devote themselves to spiritual quest. So even if we were to speak of a 'lay Buddhist movement', we should adopt the more appropriate term of 'gentry Buddhist current'.

^{1 2 3} Such ascetics in lay disguise appear in the Pali Canon as well. We find, for instance, the householder (*gahapatti*) Citta giving doctrinal clarifications and speaking of meditative practices and theories to monks (SNIV281-304). I owe this reference to Dr Cousins's kind suggestion.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am most grateful to Professor Yuichi Kajiyama who has generously given me the chance to publish in the *Annual Report*. I should like to express again my sincerest gratitude to Professor Paul Harrison who kindly invited me to join his panel at the 12th IABS Conference. My heartfelt thanks are also due to Professor Lambert Schmithausen, Dr Lance S Cousins, Dr Stefano Zacchetti, Professor Paul Harrison, and Professor Noritoshi Aramaki for their generous remarks and comments. I should also like to thank Professor Seishi Karashima, Professor Gregory Schopen, Professor Nobuyoshi Yamabe, Dr Mudagamuwe Maithrimurthi, Mr Michael Zimmermann, and Mr Martin Delhey who have kindly supported and assisted me in a variety of ways.

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Quotations from the Chinese *Tripitaka* are made from the Taishō edition (T) and they follow the usual conventions.

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